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AUBREY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "EMILIA WYNDHAM."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1854.

ABBREY

THE AUTHOR OF "EMILY WILKINSON"

"Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted within them, and they found no City to dwell in."

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IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

VOL. I.



ELIPSE

EDWARD T. LAMBERT

1884

AUBREY.

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

Oh, saw ye bonnie Leslie,
As she came across the Border.

BURNS.

It might be called a magnificent, though it was evidently, not a very ancient place.

It stood towering nearly upon the summit of a lofty eminence, commanding a wide expanse of champagne country, and backed by a range of high barren mountain hills, rising ridge above ridge in dark lowering succession. Barren and dreary they were, in truth, but concealing within their rocky bosoms mineral treasures which must ultimately become the sources of untold wealth to those who had received this, as a desolate and almost valueless inheritance, from their forefathers.

A long winding walk led along the front of the hill; it was adorned with a profusion of American shrubs, flourishing in all their surpassing beauty. Azalias, rhododendrons, and the lovely waxen kalmias were there, flourishing in the highest perfection. They formed thickets, — they throve into lofty shrubs, approaching the size of forest trees, — while the grass

beneath was enamelled with primroses, harebells, pink lychnis, and the sweet little cockle-shell stellaria struggling about among the undergrowth.

The mountain ash, at this time in full blossom; the hawthorn pink, red, white; the syringas, like orange flowers; that delight of every childish heart, the guelder-rose, lilacs, and laburnums — all that adorned the gardens of past generations, and all that modern research had added of flower wealth to our own, here mingled with a profusion — a rich extravagance of abundance, which in such things is so inexpressibly delicious — one of the few luxuries that neither palls nor enervates.

Then, in this wilderness of beauty, birds were flitting about in extraordinary quantity, for no gardener was ever suffered to disturb them. The saucy robin hopped upon the walks just under your feet, his tiny poetical partner, the wren, whistled from a low thicket, or twittered and coquetted before him; little brown creepers stole up the trunks of the larger trees, and the golden-crested wren hung from the tender young branches of the oak; the burst of song from the blackbird broke forth from the brake; the thrushes answered one another from the summit of the trees!

It was all melody and happiness in this sweet world of feathered life.

And then the view!

What a lordly expanse! — like a picture of Claude's, like a description of Milton's —

“Russet lawns and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray;
Mountains on whose barren breast
The hovering clouds do often rest;

Meadows trim with daisies pied,
Shallow brooks and rivers wide,
Towers and battlements it sees
Bosom'd high in tufted trees."

Milton, one should have thought, must have almost painted from the scene before us — to add to the beauty of which — as if to leave nothing incomplete — massive woods were seen sweeping down from the nearer hills, reflected by a very large mere, or small lake, which lay sleeping in this day's clear sunshine, at the foot of the ascent. There stood the mansion, with its extent of deepest groves, possessing a something of almost ostentatious grandeur.

It was very large, that house, built in a sort of corrupt half-eastern, half-mediæval style of architecture — where forms were strangely jumbled together, and great offences no doubt committed against correct taste; but it looked so rich — such a confusion and profusion of ornament was lavished upon it — there was so great an extent, such an endless succession of roofs, and towers, and pinnacles, and oriel windows, and lancet windows — such a grand porch leading into such a noble hall, that the effect altogether was magnificent.

Then the stables, and the gardens, and the farm building, and all and everything were upon such a scale!

An almost royal scale! — And everything kept with a precision and neatness which showed that this was no display of unreal wealth — that this mighty flow of expense was maintained by a spring of proportional force.

But, to return to the shrubbery walks, the flowers, the birds, the lovely views, the birds singing as if

in rivalry of each other, the cuckoo shouting, the sun shining, and the world of flowers of every hue around us.

Is this garden of Eden desolate, that no one appears to enjoy it?

Are its inhabitants all gone away to London at this loveliest season of the year, the two first weeks in May? — and have they left this scene of beauty to be enjoyed by half a score of gardeners, and half a dozen household servants? — as is one part of the inexplicable arrangements of people belonging to the great world?

No, one should imagine not, for here come two figures along the walk that, as a kind of terrace, crowns the brow of the hill, winding amid the purple and crimson rhododendron, the waxen al-mias, the yellow and white azalias, the purple clusters of the lilacs, and the streaming gold of the laburnums.

The one, a tall and slender figure, is that of a most lovely woman, one on whom Nature, as it sometimes pleases her to do, has lavished every perfection which belongs to complete, almost faultless, beauty — face, figure, grace of gesture, sweetness of expression, every charm was there.

She is dressed, however, with the utmost simplicity. A white muslin dress, confined by a white band of watered ribbon, clasped with a silver clasp of little value; a black silk scarf fringed at either end by the simple and cheap resource of roving away the cross threads till the others form the fringe; a light Leghorn hat, with a dark blue sarsenet ribbon. Such was her costume.

Her companion, a little girl of from three to five years old, wore a striped white and pink muslin high dress, over it a sort of blouse of white coutil, very sparingly ornamented; she had a large flapping hat tied over her profusion of curling hair, and showed beneath it a face that promised to rival in beauty that of her companion, whom one could not for an instant doubt was her mother. They are walking hand in hand, and the little girl is lifting up her head, and chattering fast, and in a most animated manner, to which the lady responds with a sort of pensive smile, and by letting fall two or three sentences from time to time, tending to guide and direct in a certain degree the flowing current of the young one's thoughts and ideas.

Soon the little hand is withdrawn — a peacock butterfly settles upon a neighbouring guelder-rose — and away she flies with a shriek of delight to pursue it.

The lady looks after her fondly, yet with a strange fondness, as if passionate love were checked by some hidden and painful feeling; then she sighs — not a sigh of tender melancholy — not one of those sighs which a heart o'erfraught with love and the exquisite beauty of things gives forth, as the only true utterance to such feelings in a world such as ours. No! but a sigh of pain, of irritation, of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfied with itself, perhaps? — perhaps with all this astounding assemblage of beauty around? Even so.

The Lady Emma, for that was this lovely creature's name, seated herself upon a wooden bench, and cast her eyes upon the view before her, now

spreading all its world of beauty to the fair shining sun; and as she gazed, her countenance assumed a strange, impatient expression, and she made a gesture with her beautiful foot as if she almost spurned it.

But, as the sun, descending towards the west, poured his streaming light upon the far-spreading landscape, diffusing a golden glow of inexpressible warmth and beauty over all things, a sadness the most pathetic stole over a face which, when softened by tenderness or melancholy, possessed an invincible charm.

So she sat there — her outer eye taking in the rich picture before her; mingling with — perhaps lending a colour to — the thoughts which so harassed and afflicted her.

Sometimes she sank into a reverie, in which past memories were but too busy; then suddenly she would stand up, clench her small fingers with a slight cry of anguish, gaze around her as if she were in a dream, and resume her place again.

Her little girl kept fluttering about the flowers, still chasing the bright blue dragon flies, or crimson butterflies; at last, having succeeded in capturing a peacock butterfly of extraordinary size and brilliancy, she came flying up to her mother, rejoicing in her prize.

She was struck aback by the dark expression of the mother's face; an expression which, once or twice during the last few weeks, she had seen there, and which she had sensibility enough to perceive, and tenderness to feel, more than is usual in a child of her age.

CHAPTER II.

What you do,
Still betters what is done; when you speak, sweet,
I'd have you do it ever; when you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so; when you do dance
I wish you a wave of the sea that you might ever do
Nothing but that.

WINTER'S TALE.

It was a large London party, what people are now in the habit of calling by its old and long exploded name of drum — a word to me signifying nothing — without etymology that I know of, or the least connexion of which I am aware between its ordinary sense and the one in which I am using it.

However, it was a drum.

And there was the usual crowding, disagreeable or agreeable, as the case may be, the usual hum of voices, the usual nothings exchanged, the usual affected laughs and vapid smiles which seem conventional among those hacknied in such assemblages; whilst the heart-beating excitement going on among the privileged few to whom such things were novelties, or to whom they afforded opportunity for interesting meetings — food for hope or for despair — all such excitements and emotions were happily concealed by the crowd, and almost as effectually as they would have been in a desert.

Of those who were still in the fresh enjoyment of newness in the world and its ways of assembling, there was one sitting in the corner of a little settee,

listening with heart and soul to a conversation which was going on behind her.

This intent listener was a young and very beautiful girl. I will not attempt to describe her in detail, I will only wish you to imagine a charming creature whose fine features, eyes of the deepest purple-blue, and hair a golden auburn, with figure tall and slender as that of a Grace upon an antique gem, only served to enhance the charm of an ardent, animated countenance full of sweetness and spirit. Added to which a certain unaffected negligence of attitude — a certain softness in the tones of her voice, rendered the Lady Emma, just presented, and enjoying her first season, the most attractive of human beings.

"To see her was to love her, and love, to love for ever."

So felt many, however far from giving words to the thought.

Enough, the Lady Emma was the rage of the season, and she was not spoiled by it.

A rare perfection this, you must allow.

For which perfection she was not indebted to any particularly careful training; to the inculcation of principles lofty and pure, which raise the soul into a region above the mere world and its temptations and delights. For, alas! the Lady Emma had never known such advantages.

No, her immunity from the frivolity, the vanity, the selfish egotism, too often fostered in the bosom of the reigning beauty of the season, arose from the simplicity of her rearing, and a something of enthusiastic, warm-hearted, truthful feeling, implanted by the good hand of nature, which seemed to teach her, as if by

instinct, the real value of the mere world's admiration and the worthlessness of the pedestal upon which she stood.

Her heart — and she had a heart, a sincere, honest, loving, though, ah! quite undisciplined heart — had as yet met with nothing in this new world upon which she had entered, to interest her.

She had been unfortunate, perhaps, you may think, but amid the host of admirers that fluttered round her, not one had offered a heart true and unsophisticated as her own — not one, but led her instantly to suspect that it was her success, rather than herself, that was worshipped — that her very face and form, her sweet gaiety, and lively feelings, would have possessed little power to charm, had it not been for the noise she had made, the universal admiration she had excited, and her being, in short, to speak vulgarly, the belle of the season.

There was one, however, that might have proved himself an exception to this rule; but that one she did not even know, had never been introduced to.

And this one is now present at the assembly.

A pale, thin, but delicately-formed man, of the middle stature he is, with a face of great beauty, singularly enhanced by a most refined expression, — for, if ever the union of intellect and sensibility were written upon a countenance, it was upon this.

This young man, plainly dressed, with a sort of unstudied yet gentlemanlike negligence that seemed well to become him, amidst the silken-lined sleeves, the fanciest waistcoats, the pearl and diamond studs of the young men around — stood leaning against a pillar in a somewhat obscure corner of the room, his

eyes fixed with a sort of passionate wonder and admiration upon the charming creature on the settee. And yet this was the first time he had ever beheld her. He rarely frequented assemblies like the present. Some accidental reason of civility had led him, after an agreeable Club dinner with some of the cleverest men of his day, to look in at this drum; and his eye had fallen upon the Lady Emma. He had gazed but a few moments on that sweet face, his ear had caught a few — very few — accents of that delightful voice, and he had become at once the victim of one of those peculiar and uncontrollable passions for which it is impossible to account. Those of the antique world attributed such things to the sudden shaft of an all-powerful divinity, but the moderns are content to marvel, and to shudder in amazement at the inexplicable force of the sentiment; acknowledging the fact that, strange as such things may appear, unquestionably such things are.

The last thing that William Aubrey ever would have expected of himself was that he should fall thus suddenly and unreasonably in love.

Hitherto he had never, as he had thought, met with any woman sufficiently worthy of his esteem to excite the passions. Who could love where they did not esteem — and esteem with good reason?

Who, indeed?

And now he had fallen before a face and a voice — was fascinated, enraptured, lost, — before he had exchanged a syllable! So irretrievably lost, indeed, that he did not even wonder at his own infatuation — did not even question himself as to its source; far less inquire where was the indispensable esteem — where

the qualities to justify such a passion. What did he know, what could he know — but that this sweet girl had the loveliest of forms and faces, and the most bewitching voice and manner in the world.

For the present he was as one entranced; he cared not even to approach her; all he desired was to be allowed to enjoy his darkened corner, and stand there watching her face.

It was a face well worth watching, it must be confessed, for varying expressions were for ever flitting over it, and the perfect *truth* of the countenance, the entire absence of all second thought, affectation, or self-occupation, rendered every expression in its turn interesting.

But how far more than beautiful that face became, as she listened to a conversation which just then began close behind her — how it lightened up with fervour, with enthusiasm! how the eye thrilled, and the colour rose!

She was only listening to two old men in naval uniforms, covered with decorations, that stood conversing behind her, and therefore the admiration of William Aubrey was not on that account distracted by jealousy. They were not very formidable rivals, these two grey-haired veterans, to whom she was giving such undivided attention.

These were some of the words she caught. "It is, take it altogether, the most brilliant action of the war — Such a youngster, too! — not even a commander! — But for coolness, judgment, heroic bravery, and that sort of enthusiastic ardour which electrifies your men — this young fellow is without a parallel — *now*,

at least;" — and a sigh was given to the memory of Nelson, as the speaker paused.

"Young is he? How old should you say?"

"Well, I said young — may be two or three and twenty — may be less — he's a handsome lad, but he has seen a good deal of service — Looks older than he is at times — when his brow is thoughtful, or his blood up — at others, he is the gayest, most careless, thoughtless being in the world."

"I admired the conclusion of the story most of all, Admiral," said a third gentleman dressed in plain clothes, who now joined in the conversation; "the story of the dog — Was it not beautiful?"

The old sea-worn veteran smiled.

"I don't know," he said. "The skill displayed in the action was really astonishing — in such a lad, too. We seamen cannot help attaching the greatest value to that sort of thing. — Yet it *was* a pretty story, that of the dog —"

And his wrinkled, weather-beaten face betrayed, by its expression, how deeply and how much he had felt it.

"The dog!" said the other naval man; "you told me nothing about a dog. Rather a curious individual to figure in a naval history like this — What of the dog?"

"Oh! tell the story again, Admiral, as you told it to me," said the gentleman in plain clothes.

And the beautiful young creature, who had been listening long, but with her face directed the other way, now moved, and lifted up her eyes and fixed them upon the old Admiral. The three gentlemen,

however, were too much occupied in their conversation to notice her.

This old Admiral had a particularly interesting way of telling stories of the present description. There was so much simple feeling and sympathy for all that was generous and good in his heart. I despair of doing his little relation justice, but I will do my best, for it is a true story, and is attached to one of the most eminent men in our Navy.

Thus the Admiral began —

“When the Frenchmen, after a merciless hard fight, had surrendered, as I told you, to this little insignificant witch of a brig — it was found, when they came to examine the captured vessel, that she was so much injured in the battle as to render it impossible to take her in tow — and, even had this not been the case, these Frenchmen so outnumbered my young lad’s squad, that to think of diminishing any of his own force, by putting them on board her, was out of the question. So it was resolved, that — taking her crew into their boats, in order to put them on board the brig — they should afterwards make for the nearest port, and leave the beautiful French vessel to her fate.

“Sink, there was every appearance that she would — but to make all sure, they added a few scuttle-holes of their own to finish the business.

“My youngster you may be sure was on board of the French vessel all this time — seeing to everything, and, more especially to the security of his men and his prisoners, as the boats passed to and fro conveying the Frenchmen, and a few necessaries of theirs, to his own vessel — and in this he was assisted by

the French Captain. A very gallant gentleman, who, though badly wounded, insisted upon remaining in the vessel to the last — and was busy in helping and consoling his men — many of them half cut to pieces — and all heart-broken at their disaster.

“In the last boat that quitted the vessel — which seemed speedily about, as we say, to settle — this gentleman took his seat, followed by my young lieutenant — who sprung into the boat the very last man, ordering the sailors, as he did so, to push away for their life — as, indeed, it was high time they should.

“But they had scarcely got a few yards from the vessel, before a cry, or rather a piteous howl, was heard from the deck — Upon which the French Captain started, turned pale, and a cry of anguish, the first he had been heard to utter that whole day — burst, as it were, from his very heart, and the tears started into his eyes.

“‘What is it? what is the matter, Sir?’ cried my young one anxiously — for you see, he had all along been very much struck with the gallant bearing and fortitude of the Frenchman.

“‘Oh, nothing, nothing,’ says the officer, shaking his head; the tears in his eyes, and at last fairly rolling down his cheeks. ‘Nothing, nothing,’ says he, ‘not to be thought of,’ — making, however, as if he would fain throw himself into the water — but his wounds, poor gentleman, were grown stiff, and he could scarcely move hand or foot.

“‘Nothing! nothing! Pray tell me what can it be? Can it be the dog?’ following his eyes as they rested upon a little animal that was now running up and

down the deck — now looking over the bulwarks, and giving signals of the utmost distress.

“‘It is an *insigne faiblesse*,’ says the Frenchman; ‘but it was *her* dog — my wife’s dog! — The dog she loved and gave to me as a last legacy, when she lay a-dying, poor creature, with her new-born baby dead beside her — She bade me treasure it, and love it for her sake. . . . And I forgot him! — I could forget him!’ And with that, fairly covering his face with his hands, he sobbed aloud like a child.

“‘Stop,’ cries my young fellow, ‘Hold hard!’ — And with that he springs over the gunwale of the boat — he swims like a fish — and he was off like a shot, and by the ship’s side, and up upon the deck — and the little dog in his arms — and he in the water again, before you could say Jack Robinson. And sure enough, had but just time to reach the boat — which luckily lay too far off to be sucked in by the swell — when the French vessel gave a heave, and went down head foremost.

“‘They blamed him,’ added the Admiral, after a pause of general silence; ‘they said he was mad to risk such a life as his for a Frenchman’s little dog. — He answered he did not consider much about it at the time, except to keep his men out of danger, and save the poor man’s dog —

“‘He did not know whether he was right or wrong — wrong, he supposed — but it was done — so let no more be said about it.’

Well, that young girl’s face, at this last speech, lighted up with something so excessively beautiful, as her bright eyes were all glistening with tears, that you never beheld anything to surpass, and seldom

anything even to equal it; whilst William Aubrey's heart beat so strangely that he was almost ill, and obliged to turn to a window for fresh air.

He did not hear one syllable of what had been said, nor did he want to hear.

He was a man of the extremest physical sensitiveness of nerve, and emotion of any kind shook him to quite a painful degree. He had always endeavoured to meet and vanquish this bodily weakness by the commanding power of his will — exercising himself in habits of fortitude and patience — accustoming himself to preserve the utmost calmness even upon occasions when people of far less real sensibility would have been overcome; but his present feelings were so altogether new, they had taken him so by surprise, that he was totally unprepared to deal with them — the insensibility of his heart until now — seemed to make the present sentiment only the more intense.

He went and stood at an open window in a farther drawing-room, to refresh and recover himself — from which window, however, he could still at times watch her as the crowd moved to and fro, and opened and closed again.

And now a sort of general excitement and sensation might be observed to pervade the mixed multitude. All eyes appeared to be directed one way, and that way was towards the large door which opened upon the staircase.

Several gentlemen were coming up together.

There had been a great dinner given at the United Service Club to celebrate the gallant action of a very young Captain and Commander — which our above-mentioned Lieutenant had become, young as were his

years — for his action had been beyond praise, and moreover —

Mark that, good reader —

His father was a very, very rich man, and powerful, and well known, though not of any very high, merely of what is called a respectable family.

These gentlemen that were coming up had just left this great dinner, and they were all in very good spirits, for the dinner had gone off remarkably well, and so they entered — a cheering, pleasant company of agreeable faces, young and old. Some in uniforms, for it had been a levee day; some in plain clothes — all crowding together. In the midst there was seen a charming-looking young man, of slight figure, rather under the middle size, with light hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, and one of those countenances which, once seen, are never to be forgotten.

This pleasing-looking young man was Edward Aubrey — the hero of the old Admiral's tale — and the hero of the day — and the twin brother of William, who stands at the distant window.

A fashionably-dressed, remarkably handsome young man — who looked much of the same age with Edward Aubrey, though he had already a certain air of man of the world, if I may so speak, which the other did not seem yet to have attained — followed close upon the rear of the young officer as he entered the room; and no sooner was he fairly in, than he put his glass to his eye and began peering and looking about him. Presently he put his hand through Edward's arm, and said, "I'm looking about for all the prettiest girls to make you acquainted with, Edward — but the beauty of beauties — the pearl beyond price, is my sister;

and where is she?" looking round a little while, "Oh! oh! I spy — Come along; let me present you at once."

And so saying he led the young Captain back to the settee where his sister, the Lady Emma, sat in all and more than her usual beauty, and her eyelashes still moist with the tears which had gushed up at the story of the dog.

Oh, such a sweet glory of an April morn as was that face just then.

How she started, and rose up, and held out her hand, drew it back again, colouring like a rose, and sat down looking a little ashamed; and how he, flattered and amazed at the sight of so much beauty and so sweet an emotion, stammered, and bungled, and coloured too; and how, if Lord Algernon had not laughed merrily and good-humouredly, and set them both at ease, they might have been troubled and uncomfortable all the evening, I need not enlarge upon. But Lord Algernon's ready laugh and his ease soon made them both feel more comfortable, and the three began to talk pleasantly together. Edward with his hand leaning upon the arm of the settee, drawing himself a little back modestly; and Lord Algernon standing full front and chattering away with his sister — for he was a great talker; and she lifting up her eyes first to her brother, and laughing a little, and then softly in a shy, sweet way glancing at the stranger, as he spoke in a lower voice, but in a still more natural and pleasant manner than his companion.

She looking so surpassingly lovely all the time.

But felicity such as this is not fated to last long in

London parties, at least not for lions, and Mrs. Lionhunter is already at Edward Aubrey's side, and is saying in her most insinuating, flattering, and fascinating way:

"Oh! I must not let even dear, beautiful Lady Emma absorb you altogether — you know you are a species of public property this evening."

And so she dragged him away to be introduced to I don't know who, any more than he cared who.

The pale student had remained at the open window — feeling really unequal to encountering the heat of this excessively-crowded room again. He had stood there watching the sweet countenance of the Lady Emma with feelings of unmixed delight, the delight of the highest and fondest admiration, before jealousy, or distrust, future hopes or future despair, have all blurred over and confused the picture — he had watched her look of animated excitement, as she listened to the discourse of the two elderly gentlemen; and as he had not the most distant idea of the subject matter of the conversation, it was impossible, as I said, he should feel the slightest twinge of jealousy on account of those two hoary veterans —

But now the little bustle at the door leading to the staircase had excited his attention, and through the waving crowd he had seen his brother Edward entering the room, surrounded and ushered in, as it were, in a sort of triumph by a crowd of brother officers and friends. A pang shot through him — yes, there was a pang; he hated himself for it; he always hated,

he detested himself for such feelings; but it was an old sore; and these old sores of the heart are awful things.

Awful temptations — deep gulphs of misery!

A pang there was; and the pale cheek grew paler, and the dark eye more clouded, as it rested upon the gay, brilliant, and apparently thoughtless young fellow thus ushered in.

Brother, and more than brother! — twin brother! — alas! alas! that that which should have been as a double bond of love should, by the careless injustice of parents, have become only a source of deeper and bitterer jealousy!

William Aubrey at once passionately loved his brother; dreaded and envied; admired, yet censured, him. He acknowledged all his sweet engaging qualities; yet, in spite of Edward's innumerable fascinations, he felt, and believed himself to be the superior; and his heart, from earliest childhood, had rankled with a sense of injustice towards himself.

These feelings, contrasted and strange as they were, seemed almost to have been born with him: he never could recollect the time when his heart had not, as it seemed, been poisoned with them, exasperated as they had been by the partiality of parents, who, heedless of the very first law of parental duty, had embittered the existence of one child by their undisguised partiality for the other — as they contrasted the warm, expansive character of Edward with that of the cold and shy reserve of a sensitive child — disliked for the very reserve and shyness which their distaste had contributed to create.

The boy so pale, so delicate, so fretful, so diffi-

cult to manage or to rear, appeared in truth to poor advantage by the side of the vigorous, high-spirited, generous lad, who had a heart for everybody, — father, mother, kinsmen, friends, but above all for his brother.

Instead of, as twins most often do, resembling each other in external feature and general disposition, in this case the very reverse had happened. It would almost seem as if one infant had abstracted the vital essence from his brother. The one was far above the average in every physical perfection that can belong to a new-born child, the other seemed with difficulty even to breathe.

The beautiful vigorous baby, who was, moreover, the first-born, was taken to the mother's bosom, and the delicate puny infant, whom no one cared for, was, by the advice of the medical man, placed in the hands of a wet-nurse. Perhaps the medical man was right, medically speaking, for the mother was a young woman, gay and fashionable, and not inclined to sacrifice the world to the nursery; but the result proved unfortunate. Unthinking, and wanting in all sound principle to guide her impulses, the mother yielded herself up to her partiality for the beautiful child, her own proper nursling, and spoke with indifference of the other, as a poor, little weeny thing that she was afraid she should never be brought to endure.

She felt no compunction at this partiality. She had little idea of duty, and never thought of considering that the first duty of a parent is impartiality — most perseveringly to root out, and, if that be not altogether possible, sacredly to conceal any inclination

to an undue preference of one child before another. Parental partiality! Oh, that is the injustice which drives the child to despair! all other partialities, all other inequalities, all other preferences may be endured; but this seems to penetrate into the sanctuary, to drive the young heart from its place of refuge — for in the security of the mother's love compensation is found for every other evil. When this fails, the shipwreck is fearful — and who shall say how much that is precious in that shipwreck for ever goes down?

People loved Edward for his beauty, his vigour, his spirit, his good humour, and were tempted almost to adore him for his affection for the less amiable brother; and, when that unhappy and embittered child would at times repulse any somewhat boisterous mark of affection, how shocked and disgusted they would feel! They pitied Edward at such times, and loved him all the more for their pity, for Edward had the tenderest of hearts; and, young as he was, would be hurt even to tears at times; and great was the sympathy he then inspired. But no one guessed, for no one cared to guess, no one sympathised with the intenser sufferings of the other, and no one observed or understood the sensitive delicacy of a temperament so unlike that possessed by any of his family. The father was a powerful man, the mother all health and spirits and gaiety, relations upon each side of the same constitution. William, alone, was a victim to that exquisite and most painful tenderness of nerve, caused by, or the cause of, an almost morbid sensibility of character, — a sensibility, however, in this, as in most instances, compensated by the possession of the rarest intellectual gifts.

Morbid sensibility of the nerves is, of course, the cause of frequent depression of spirits; and the demon of the flesh, which in gayer and stronger natures assumes the more tempestuous forms of temptation, may, in these more delicate ones, be detected lurking like a venomous reptile amid the hidden recesses of the heart; whispering the thousand base suggestions of fear, of envy, of jealousy, of unreasonable anxiety — temptations against which we are as sedulously warned in that blessed code we are bound to obey, as against the more open and licentious vices.

But what mattered that code to them?

That code was as a dead letter in this family — an old forgotten law.

Neither William, nor Edward, had ever been taught to venerate, to study, or to form themselves upon that.

It was a matter of course in their father's household that everybody should go to Church on a Sunday morning, dine an hour earlier than customary upon that day, and have only a few intimate friends to dinner. But here ended the religious observances in the house of Aubrey, and everybody thought they had done all that was necessary. Many of their neighbours did much less, — conscience was quite at rest.

It never entered into the head of either Mr. Aubrey, or of his wife, to doubt but that they were very good Christians.

CHAPTER III.

A sudden, subtle flame,
By veering passion fanned.

TENNYSON.

WE return from the somewhat long digression of the last chapter to the gay and crowded — the humming and buzzing apartments, where the twin brothers now are.

The one has drawn further back into the shadow of the window curtains, and his eye still follows the sort of triumphant entry, as I have called it, of the other — he who comes forward so charming-looking, so fresh, so easy, so gay, with his delightful countenance, his light, waving hair, and that indescribable look which seems to belong to accomplished naval men, and to them alone, and which is so winning to every beholder. And lo! he is brought up to the settee upon which sits the idol, the divinity, the worshipped one of William's heart! She! the first — and he felt it would be the last — for whom that heart would ever tremble, and for which it was already sinking and dying. And the sweet smile, the lambent brightness of the eyes and countenance with which she receives him!

There was a strange sense of bitterness arising.

"But no," a voice within him seemed to say, "this triumph he shall *not* achieve. *I* saw her first — *I* loved her first. He has supplanted me in all other things;

he hath the birthright; I am a mere younger brother, though born of the same bed, in the same half-hour. One is a prince and the other a pariah. All *that* has been given up, of course, but this shall not be given up. I saw her first, I loved her first; brother Edward, *I bar that.*"

What folly!

As if it depended upon the *rights* of the matter, if rights they could be called, whether the joyous and victorious sailor, or the pale, melancholy student should best make his way to a fair woman's heart.

But he thought not of the absurdity; he clung to, and hugged the idea that he had spied out and appropriated the treasure first; that it was his — and that his brother should not supersede him.

There was little satisfaction in watching the Lady Emma now, and one of his occasional nervous headaches came on, so that the noise and heat of the room became very oppressive, and feeling dizzy — indeed, half distracted — he stole away without noticing his brother, who was not aware that he was in the room, and went down stairs and took his hat, and refusing the offer to call his cab, which he left for his servant to take his chance with, and come home when he was tired of waiting — he walked up Grosvenor Street, where all these fine doings were going on, and so to the fresh air of the park.

The night was glorious, the stars were shining like suns, the air calm and clear, the moon sinking behind the distant trees.

The fresh breeze saluted him as he approached the park, refreshing his fevered brow, and calling a faint colour into his wan and delicate cheek.

Nature looked so beautiful in its calm silence. He had a poet's eye and heart, and he worshipped nature.

Till now this worship had been to him a source of his purest and most unmixed delight. His heart entirely free — his sensibility to beauty so keen — his imagination so fervent and bright, the loveliness of nature had been a sort of compensation for all other love. He looked upon her, and she seemed to look upon him with a certain tenderness. He felt himself her child — he, who had no other parent!

Morbid feelings these were, perhaps; but morbid or not, they were the sweetest of his life.

But now all is changed.

"Il faut l'amour ou la religion pour gouter la nature," says Madame de Stael.

But love not only possesses the power to brighten and give interest to scenes of natural beauty; it has alas! another power — to deaden by contrast all other sensations but its own, rendering all stale, flat, and unprofitable in which it has no share — and therefore it is, that unrequited love is so fatal a bane of human happiness; not only that the one source of exquisite felicity is dried up, but that with it all goes — that taken, all is taken, and life becomes a dreary, loveless wilderness, where no water is.

He was shocked at himself, when he perceived the change which had taken place in his feelings as he wandered over the grass and under the trees — his favourite solitudes at early morning, before the busy throng had stained their freshness.

Where was all this beauty now?

With her! the barest prison walls — the darkest

and deepest dungeon would have been a paradise! without her, all creation would be as nothing.

Unaccountable effect of one brief half-hour.

One consolation he had, however; it was a fond, but it is a common superstition. The very intensity of this sudden passion seemed to him as a reason for its success — it was as something supernatural — something *sent* — sent to a purpose. What was so transcendent could not be without result. As was the greatness of his love so must be the greatness of his claim. The Lady Emma was his — could only be his. It seemed as if nothing on earth could be strong enough to snatch her from him.

And he had not exchanged one word with her — had not even asked to be introduced.

While William in this manner beguiles his passion in the Park, Edward, in a much happier, though rather more commonplace way, is indulging his, by dancing with the lovely creature, of whom he was already, with a true seaman's heartiness, become the undisguisedly passionate admirer.

He had hesitated a moment through modesty, when the music struck up (for a little carpet dance was to conclude the evening); but the deep blue eyes glanced at him, almost expectingly, as he thought; so with an air of devotion the most sweet and engaging, he offered himself for her partner, and soon they were united in all the bright delirium of the dance.

Oh that young sailor's heart! how it bounded! how it overflowed with happiness! Such pure downright

happiness. He was not troubled with doubts and cares, not he. — He who thinks little, if ever, about himself, escapes that bane of present enjoyment. He was wrapt up in her. His admiration in fact knew no bounds, and he thought himself the most blessed and privileged fellow upon earth, to have come across such a divine beauty.

To dance with her till she was ready to faint for want of breath; to support, almost carry her to her seat; to hang over her and fan her; to fly, when fanning seemed vain, to a neighbouring window and let in the fresh air — to tremble lest the fresh air should be too cold for her — to catch up the lace shawl of some one thrown upon a chair near, and throw it over her — to ask what he should fetch her, — “iced water, wine, — what —” to be answered by those sweet, pleased smiles. With smiles of amusement and delight mingled. A little amusement at his assiduity, so unlike the ordinary staid attentions of young men of fashion — delight with all he said and did, but most of all with the adoration which beamed in his eyes, and found an answer in her heart! so she responded to all this.

And the feelings of the heart were already giving a softness to her voice, a certain timid shyness to her manner, that rendered her more than ever irresistible.

She would not let him fetch her anything, but being a little recovered, said, that the noise of the cornet-à-piston, which certainly was now blowing furiously, made her head ache; and that she would go down to the refreshment room. So he offered his arm, which she took; and he led her along the room, and down the stairs, and every one who met them smiled

with a sort of cordial sympathy; for every one seemed to feel that this young hero of the day, and the loveliest girl of the season, were well paired; and, besides, people knew, that Edward Aubrey was the heir of a very large fortune, and quite entitled by his social position to take a wife from among the fair daughters of the aristocracy.

Wife, fortune, or such things, he, as yet, thought not about, his soaring imagination was a flight far above that. Time enough for such prosaic matters by-and-by, at present it was the love infinite which regards nothing but its object. To hand refreshments to her was now his pleasant task; and when that was done, she went and sat down upon a couch in a cool and shady part of the room, and he sat down by her.

And then a charming conversation began between the two; and she, who was all curiosity and interest about everything which concerned him, began to talk about the sea, and the dangers and excitements of a seaman's life; and to tell him about her brother Algernon; and how she loved him the best of all her brothers, because he was the sailor boy. Desdemona, my dear — remember *she* spoke almost too plainly, but in truth, your talk was as guileless as hers.

She loved Algernon the best of all her brothers, though she had seen little or nothing of him for the last four years. This war kept every one at sea, and when he did come on shore, he had usually spent his time in London — just running down now and then to see her and her sisters, who remained with the governess at the family place in Ireland, none of them being introduced, for she was the elder by some years, and this was her first season in London.

It was now two years since she had seen Algernon, till just that very day, as she was coming down with her mother, dressed to go out to dinner; he ran into the house, saying he was that moment arrived, and ran out again almost as quickly, to find himself lodgings, where he could dress for the great dinner he was going to — one given at the United Service Club to Captain Aubrey, of the *Seagull* — “And that is the first time I heard your name mentioned,” she said.

He bowed and coloured.

Then Lady Emma said,

“You and Algernon are great friends, are you not?”

He hesitated a little moment, and then he answered,

“I should pay myself too great a compliment, I fear, if I said that.”

“How can you say so? How can your friendship be anything but an honour to any one?”

“Your brother. Oh! that is a different thing.”

“How different? I don’t understand,” she was about to say, but she stopped, coloured, and cast down her eyes.

She was prettier than ever; lovely as her eyes were.

“Since you do not think it presumptuous in me to claim the honour,” he said, looking at her with much tender admiration in his face; “since you do not think it presumptuous in me to claim the honour, I may say that Lord Algernon and I have been considerable allies whenever we have met, and I feel now — now I think — I hope — we may be called friends.”

And yet, whilst he said this, something within him

said, "No — acquaintance, familiar acquaintance, close allies if you will — but not friends!"

Lord Algernon was of about the same age as Edward, but, as I have told you, amazingly more practised in the ways of the world.

His parents, the Marquis and Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux, were commonplace worldly people in their several ways — he, a needy and embarrassed Irish peer, hungering after money, and she, an uneasy mother, weighed down with the shifts and cares of pride, poverty, ambition, and many children.

Struggling after what might distinguish her as a leader of ton, and enable her in due time to establish her daughters — anything deserving the name of a right education, — the rearing a child in habits of religious principle and moral rectitude, had been quite out of the question in her family. The children were left to take their chance. Governesses such as they were sometimes had been, sometimes not, provided for the girls; the boys were sent mere children to school, there to take their chance. Lord Algernon, with whom we have chiefly to do, had early entered a very large private school, under a very severe master, who, thrash him as he might, could thrash no learning into this boy's incorrigible head; and whose severity only served to harden him to rebellion and the most daring defiance of every obligation, human and divine. From thence he had passed to one of our great public schools, being at the time intended for the Church. There he had distinguished himself by his wildness and daring indifference to authority of every description, much to the admiration of most of his fellows, who thought all this prodigiously clever. He did not, indeed, want for

parts, which the daring audacity of his character rendered dazzling in the eyes of a parcel of schoolboys, and which to a certain degree even blinded the masters to his faults. At last one of his exploits was of so glaring a nature that, son of a marquis as he was, and destined for the Church, and a very large family living, it was found necessary to expel him. Upon which he at once went to sea, and continued his wild career in every place, and upon every occasion, where the opportunity for excess and self-indulgence offered. This mad behaviour still rendered him but too brilliant and seductive in the eyes of his companions, and his superiors unfortunately found some compensation for his errors in his reckless bravery, cool resolution, and ready judgment upon all occasions which had called for the exhibition of such qualities.

Edward Aubrey's lately-acquired renown made him an object of attraction in every circle; and Lord Algernon, who in the midst of all his apparent wildness, ever kept an eye to the main chance, was ready enough to claim the acquaintance begun at sea, and to establish it at once upon a more intimate footing than Edward had understood it to be. But Edward was easy, careless, and good tempered; his head, perhaps, a little turned by his success, and he felt flattered by Lord Algernon's advances; partly as coming from a man of station superior to his own; partly because he was universally reckoned a very clever fellow; most of all because he was the brother of Lady Emma.

And now the party is about to break up; and the Marchioness comes to take her daughter away.

The two young men who had kept assiduously

near her, attended the two down stairs, Lord Algernon giving his arm to the mother, and thus leaving the too happy Edward to attend upon the fair sister, and to enjoy the pleasure of all the little familiar chat and laugh which attends upon seeking for a *sortie de balle* among heaps of shawls and wraps of all descriptions, and upon assisting to place it upon the beauteous shoulders, seeing the strings tied under the prettiest chin in the world, the blue eyes sparkling, the lips smiling, the manner so pleasant, so sweet, so winning all the while!

The young men placed the ladies in their carriage, the tall footman shouted "home," jumped up into his comfortable seat on springs behind, and away they drive. A piece of humanity this same foot board on springs, by the way, which it is astonishing was not thought of sooner. But so it is with all humane inventions, when once they are adopted we shudder at the barbarity of which, whilst it was in practice, we never thought, and were partakers like the rest of the world. Who thought of the injury their footmen sustained upon the hard, rattling foot-board of old times? Let us look around and see what negligences of this sort still exist in our daily domestic arrangements.

"Home," shouted the footman, and away drove the carriage, and Edward stood for a few moments bare-headed upon the steps, watching it as it rolled down the street, and then he sighed, and turned into the house to seek his hat.

As he was preparing to cross the threshold, and depart, an arm was thrust through his.

"Whither bound?" said the voice of Lord Algernon.

"Why, home, I suppose."

"Home! and at this time of night! — Why man, it's not gone three yet."

"Time for all sober people to be in bed," said Edward, endeavouring to turn away.

He wanted to be alone with his own excited thoughts.

"Sober people! — granted — but to that category, I should opine, neither you nor I strictly belong."

"I have always esteemed myself a model of sobriety," said Edward, quietly, "at least, in comparison with your noble self; and to-night I have a head-ache, and shall go home."

"A head-ache! — poor dear fellow — is that all? Something a good deal better or a good deal worse than that, I take it, is the matter. Pshaw! my good lad, you mistake the age you live in. Men don't, in these our days, go about mewling, and puking, and stealing home, when they have got anything the matter just here. — That's not the way to win a mistress in this our good nineteenth century. — The girls of these days study metaphysics and ride a fox-hunting — and like a dashing fellow in their hearts — and abhor a milksop — wick you never were, Aubrey; so, for luck's sake, don't begin now."

"Come along with me," he rattled on, "to the Club — not that hum-drum United Service Club, Senior or Junior — but to a special little affair got up in a corner by a few choice spirits, with no old grey-beards to lay down the law. — Come along with me, and we'll have a morsel of supper, and toast a

fair unknown, in hock or champagne of the prime — and maybe take a hand at picquet, or let that alone if we like better — Liberty Hall it is at this Phoenix of Clubs — this little jewel of the tribe. Every man doth what is right in his own eyes there — Come along!”

The invitation was tempting, for it was the brother of his charmer who gave it, so Edward suffered himself to be guided by Lord Algernon, who still leaned upon his arm, until, after traversing various fashionable streets, they came to one a little out of the way, where this gambling house was situated — for neither more nor less was that, which Lord Algernon designated as Club.

The house was rather small, and of unpretending appearance outside, but within, it was replete with every imaginable luxury.

The furniture was of extreme elegance, no expense had been spared. The walls were hung with choice pictures, or what pretended at least to be, choice pictures. The *cuisine* was, to say the least of it, such as to far exceed the ordinary *recherche* and perfection thought indispensable for the Club world of the times we live in.

The company assembled in the drawing room which our young men entered, seemed chiefly to belong to the higher aristocratical circles, and most if not all quite young men — many almost boys. Of this company some were lounging half asleep upon the sofas — some dosing over newspapers — some, comfortably ensconced in arm chairs, were reading. There was no play going on in this drawing room — neither cards nor dice being there allowed — but

from behind door cases, hung with portières of rich embroidery, sounds might be heard which betrayed what was passing behind the scenes. Low murmuring discourse, as of men busily engaged at cards; and now and then the rattle of the dice-box; and now and then deep tones as of suppressed emotion; and now and then a sharp feverish laugh; and now and then a smothered oath.

It might have reminded one of that portal of hell, where stood Dante and listened to the fatal sounds that issued mingled from that drear empire.

Duri lamenti, ed alti guai.

But Lord Algernon left Aubrey no time to speculate upon the scene before him. He had ordered supper as they came up stairs and he now carried him down to what was called the coffee-room, in which numbers of small tables were arranged, at which young men were seen sitting alone, or in small parties. The two with whom we have to do were speedily engaged upon the most delicate and elegant little supper that could be well imagined, and were pledging each other in the finest of wines to the fair unnamed — for neither lover nor brother, by a sort of instinct of respect and delicacy, chose that her name should be uttered within these precincts.

The supper over, Aubrey prepared to pay his share of the cost, but this Lord Algernon would not permit. He said that it was his business, and flung down, in his usual reckless manner, two or three pieces of gold, not condescending to wait for his change.

CHAPTER IV.

What time the mighty moon was gathering light,
Love paced the thymy plots of Paradise,
And all about him roll'd his lustrous eyes.

TENNYSON.

THE two young men did not go up stairs again that night. They strolled homewards together, and parted at the top of St. James's street.

Edward Aubrey's way lay along Piccadilly, and by the Green Park.

The morning was by this time beginning to dawn, and in the eastern sky faint lines of light indicated the approaching day. His head was in a tumult, his temple veins beating with excitement. He could not bear the idea of going into a house, more especially to his father's house in Dover street, which, though large and handsome, was so closely pent up behind and in front — the front by the narrow street, the back choked up with buildings. So he, too, turned towards the trees, and the green of the parks — their quiet and their freshness, and, entering the Green Park through the little iron gate, got into the long walk running eastward and westward. It was now totally deserted, he had it all to himself, and kept pacing up and down lost in the fond foolish fancies of a young romantic lover, and that lover, too, a sailor.

His dreams were delightful, but still more delightful than any dream was the one reality which he

hugged to his heart. Lord Algernon had asked him to call upon him that day at his father's house in Regent's Park — the ostensible reason to plan a ride somewhere or other, no matter where.

No matter, indeed, he was to call at the house where Lady Emma lived, and henceforth the door of that house would be opened to him.

The clocks were striking five ere he bethought himself of going home.

The two brothers met the next morning.

Edward was taking a late breakfast; his father had long ago finished his, and had been gone out an hour or two. William had breakfasted with Mr. Aubrey, but he had not yet left the room; he was sitting buried in an arm chair reading, or seeming to read.

Late it was when Edward appeared, his face looking pale, and somewhat jaded — for, truth to tell, he had not closed his eyes that night, late as it was when he went to bed. His mind was in too great a state of excitement to allow him to sleep.

The young sailor, accustomed to an existence of contention with the elements, to the fresh and stirring life of winds and waves — seeking composure if his spirits were accidentally ruffled, by pacing his deck, gazing upon the mighty ocean below, upon the multitudinous stars above, imbibing, as it were, into his soul, the grandeur of the infinite — was quite bewildered in the whirl and confusion of this great Babylon where he now found himself, for the first time since he had been a mere boy.

His ideas were all in confusion — This very idle, very pleasant, but altogether new, artificial life into which he was suddenly plunged, contrasted in every respect to the simple but strenuous existence in which he had been engaged, seemed at first quite to bewilder his senses. A little time and a little practice would, however, soon have accustomed him to it, and he would have learned to take matters as quietly as other young men of his acquaintance, had not the strong impulse of love, the tumults of that rare thing in a life of the great world, a genuine passion, interfered to perplex him still further.

Nothing could be less in harmony.

On board his ship the generous emotions with which his heart was swelling would have been all in unison with the grand and simple of nature around him; but with the noise, bustle, hurry, and trivial excitement of a London season, what had they to do?

Poor Edward! he knew not, as the French say, where to find himself. The mere nervous excitement he felt, would alone have been sufficient to deprive him of rest.

Not so with William.

William was still less of this world; but he knew it and understood it and all its littlenesses well — and, knowing, he disliked and despised it.

Both possessing superior talents, no two young men could be much more opposed in character than were these brothers. The one was formed for action and actual life, the other for contemplation, and the exercise of those loftier functions of thought and intellect which belong to a higher and purer world of light than that we see around us. Ardent and generous,

Edward had achieved success and found happiness in that struggle with *facts*, which is the part of the hero — William had sought peace in the indulgence of that thoughtful, far-searching mind which is the universe of the poet and the philosopher. In this his subjective life he had found what he sought, until he was suddenly awakened as from a dreamy trance, to intense emotion, — to passionate reality, — by the unexpected sentiment which had taken entire possession of him.

That which threw the one brother into the regions of imagination and poetry, revealed to the other the depths of real life.

But these feelings were not, as with Edward, the source of contradiction and confusion, of nervous excitement, and trembling disorder of faculty. Serious, earnest, refined, his sense of beauty most delicate, his imagination alive to that ideal which is poetry, before it has found words, — these new, deep, fervent feelings, were in harmony with the old life within, and only served to vivify and to glorify it.

His sharp fit of jealousy against his brother had speedily subsided. Something seemed to whisper within, that not for the gay, brave, somewhat thoughtless Edward, was this angel of loveliness destined, but for another and a more earnest heart. He did himself, perhaps, more than justice; but brilliant as was Edward, William ever felt himself to be the superior. *He* knew what was within himself; the delicacy of perception, the high imagination, the sound and strong intellect with which he had been endowed, and he felt, and perhaps truly, that the man so endowed, who does, indeed, love, loves as none other can — and

that such a love, and such a heart, is the noblest treasure woman can obtain.

He fancied he saw in the Lady Emma that assurance of her being one to estimate the value of such a treasure. That divine thing which was in, and about her seemed formed to harmonize, rather with the finer intellect, than with the handsomer and more dazzling man.

But was Edward even handsomer? William looked into his glass. It was, perhaps, the first time in his life that he had ever done so with the intention of criticising his own personal appearance. One does not look to advantage inspecting one's self thus. Suffice it to say, he was surprised — pleased and surprised at once, at what he saw.

There was a something — not greater beauty certainly — but a something which he felt Edward never did, nor could possess. So his jealousy had vanished like an ugly night dream, and he was prepared to be just as cordial with his brother as ever. Cordial he always was; nevertheless, to say the truth, William did not after all love Edward very much. Characters of his stamp are, I think, not very much given to strong, mere natural affection, as it is called. Their sympathies are less the result of accident than of choice. They are probably too nice in their perceptions — too fastidious perhaps to attach themselves very warmly to those relations which nature, or accident, have thrown in their way, and Edward was not a character very strongly to interest his brother — interesting and dear as he was found to be by most people.

Edward, on the contrary, loved William exceed-

ingly. He acknowledged and rejoiced in his brother's superiority of intellect — thought himself the luckiest fellow in the world to be connected with such a man — boasted of his acquirements, gloried in his success at college — in the splendour of his intellect, and the powers of his understanding, and gladly, joyfully, "knocked under," as his phrase was, to the superiority he appreciated so highly.

But to return. Here he comes at last to his very late breakfast, looking and feeling very jaded and uncomfortable, yet with a sort of secret joy dancing in his eyes, "for is he not to call at her father's house that day?"

William lifted up his head from his book.

"You are late this morning, Edward," said he.

"Very. — What o'clock is it? I did not come in till five last night."

William shook his head.

"My father does not like such hours, Edward. I am afraid you must contrive to be a little earlier in — or at least a little earlier down. You are a prodigious favourite, as you well know; but my father has his little peculiarities — I think they have grown upon him of late — and nothing annoys him more than irregular hours."

"Well, but, William," said Edward, sitting down to the uncomfortable ruin of a breakfast, and pouring himself out a cold cup of coffee, "you must be reasonable. — One does not come on shore, after five years spent at sea, to use one's self to another man's idea of hours — and go to bed when it strikes nine."

"Don't drink that cold stuff," said William, ringing the bell. "At the risk of our good father's displeasure,

I have ordered some hot coffee to be kept ready for you."

"Thank you — but displeasure! — You don't mean to say that he was really displeased."

"Well, *displeased* is a strong term, as applied to you and him. — It would be difficult for you to displease him. But *annoy* — and you would not like to annoy him."

"No, certainly; but there is reason in all things. I can *not* be a prisoner, Will. It's against my very nature. I'd rather be a galley slave at once, than be bound down with this sort of domestic chain. — My father is so good — so kind to me, that to vex him would be a constant torment of remorse — and yet, to be a good boy, and come home just when I ought, and not to do this, and not to do that — not to have my swing when I am swinging — I declare to you again, I would rather be bound by real chains, that I could swear at, and perhaps, break asunder — than carry these tender fetters, soft though they be — fetters which it would be unnatural to swear at, and impious to break!"

And he began, somewhat impatiently, to swallow large pieces of icy cold toast and butter.

William once more dropped his eyes upon his book, seeming to read, whilst Edward tossed down the hot coffee which a servant brought in; then he looked at his watch, and with a "Who would have thought it had been so late?" ordered his horse.

"It is late," said William; "and just give me leave, Edward — my father —"

"Our father, if you please, William."

"Our father — I beg your pardon. It is the com-

mon way of expressing one's self — *our* father, then, dotes upon you — I use the vulgar phrase, for really I cannot find any other that so completely expresses the thing I mean. He is excessively proud of what you have done — what father would not? — But, moreover, you are, as you must well know, peculiarly his son — You are his heir. Every man looks upon his heir as doubly his son; and in all probability, and not quite unreasonably — he expects his son and heir to look upon him as more than ordinarily his father. Now — all the forenoon you are rushing about town, nobody knows where — and all the afternoon you are on horseback — and you dine out every day, unless there is a party at home, — and my father is in bed long before you come in — so, if you do not appear at breakfast, when is he to see you?"

Edward's face, which had looked a little vexed and out of humour at first, gradually assumed such a sweet, cordial expression, as his brother went on speaking, that had you been there, you would have been ready to dote too.

"Dear William," he cried, "what a selfish, thoughtless wretch you make me out to be!"

"Hard words," his brother answered, and smiled — smiled in a more affectionate manner than was usual with him, for Edward was irresistible when moved by sudden emotion: his feelings were so genuine and so good.

"Hard words you apply to yourself, Edward — harder than I should ever be tempted to use, were you a thousand times more thoughtless than perhaps you are — or selfish than you certainly are *not* — But, recollect, I warn you — Have a care. My father —

our father — is a singular sort of man. To common observers he may appear, and he does appear, much like other commercial men who have wealth and leisure enough to assume the gentleman — according to their idea of such beings — but the world in general know him as little as he knows himself. He has led such an active, bustling life, that he has had little time for reflection — not much for feeling. — When circumstances urge a man on so rapidly, there is scarcely a pause left for feeling. — Nothing but a complete break-down — something quite out of the common course — crossing, and, as it were, interrupting the current of a man's life, and occasioning a sort of stand-still in existence — when the man lives to and in himself — learns first to know himself — can call forth the deep utterances of the soul. — Many men die, leaving the scene, without having once given witness of what is within. — God grant that my father may do the same — for his awakening from the dream in which he lives might be awful.”

Edward had tossed off another cup of coffee whilst his brother was thus discoursing, rather as if thinking aloud, than as addressing another. He now rose and came to the fire, and stood there, leaning with his back against the chimney-piece, and looking attentively at his brother.

William was silent, and his eyes were fixed again upon his book.

Edward was silent, too, for some time. At last he said,

“Have a care! — Have a care of what?”

“Of offending him,” answered his brother, without lifting up his head.

"I hope I am incapable of doing anything that *ought* to offend him — and *I* never saw that in him which would lead me to suppose that he would take offence unjustly and without reason."

"Perhaps not. — But he may be unjust and unreasonable in the degree to which he carries out offended feelings, in themselves perhaps not ungrounded."

"But I don't intend — I hope it is impossible that I can intend — to give cause for any well-grounded anger — for certainly I should not call his anger well grounded because I asserted my liberty of action. — That liberty, William, which you know as well as I know, lies after a certain age at the foundation of all manly character, and the right to which you assert as decidedly as I do — or you would not be the man I take you for."

"Well, well — think upon what I have said, and be in time for breakfast to-morrow morning."

"But, do you know, that what you say half inclines me to assert my independence, and stay away."

"I did not think you had still so much of the child in you."

"For child, read fool," said Edward, again recovering his good humour; "but the worst of it is," he added, sitting down by his brother, "the unfortunate part of all misunderstandings between fathers and sons, as I conceive this matter to be, lies — in these cursed relations of money. Sons are unreasonable, and want too much — fathers are niggardly, and give too little. — The balance between age and youth can rarely be struck with fairness — but there is far worse than that. — Such petty dissatisfactions don't reach the pith of the matter. — The worst is, that every

thought and feeling is perverted by the fear of being actuated, or thought to be actuated, by base motives of self-interest. — I declare I could sacrifice every enjoyment — give up the assertion of my dear liberty of action for ever — were it not that my so doing might secure ... I hate to think of it — other things besides the *affection* of my father.”

— “Over-refiner,” said William. “Nonsense! — forgive me for saying so — but what have you to gain or lose? — You know everything he has in the world, except my share in my mother’s settlement, he has given to you — and you know well, or, at least, I know well, that happen what might — No, no; — that is saying too much — it would take a great deal — it would be hard matter for you to offend him. — But once do it — and his anger would be like his love — extravagant as that is illimitable. — Therefore, have a care.”

“Well, I’ll be down at his breakfast to-morrow, but now —” getting up and going to the window — “I must look out for my horses, for I protest it is going hard upon two o’clock — and at half-past, I promised to join Algernon —”

“Algernon!” repeated William, looking suddenly up.

“Not Algernon Sidney,” said Edward, laughing, “you need not look so excited, William — no Algernon Sidney restored to earth for the benefit of you hero worshippers — but a very different sort of person I can assure you, — Algernon Mordaunt, in short, the wildest young fellow in existence at times — or as grave and staid as yourself when so it pleaseth him.”

“I have heard of him, Edward. — He is a person,

already somewhat too notorious, for his name to have escaped even one so much out of the world as I am."

"Notorius! That means celebrity in an evil sense, you anatomisers of words would, I suppose, tell us. I know no particular harm in him — do you? — I do not think I have any very great liking to him. — True, he and I appear to take life much in the same way — and do so, as far as the mere surface of things lies — but there is much in me that I should never tell him — and which he would laugh at and not understand if I did."

"So I should think, indeed."

"But I like him well enough — and we wanderers upon the ocean cannot afford to be very particular in our companionships. We must take up with what comes. — So I took up with him in the Levant. He was far the best of the set we had there, in spite of his faults. — But I never much cared for the honour of his acquaintance until last night, and then —" and a fine colour flew to his cheek, — "I own I was very glad that I knew him."

"As how?"

"He is the brother of Lady Emma."

"Lady Emma! Who is Lady Emma?"

"Oh! the finest creature upon the face of the earth — one that he introduced me to last night — his sister — daughter to the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux. Emma — Lady Emma. — She was sitting upon a little settee, in the most lovely attitude eyes ever beheld, and she rose at the introduction — and oh, William! I was fool and puppy enough to read a certain sweet confusion in her eyes, and a trembling in her voice — as if I was not just like a new, every

day acquaintance to her. Laurels! They may cover me over — me unworthy — with laurels. I would barter them all for this little sprig of myrtle," and he laughed joyously, almost triumphantly.

William looked at him from under the half-closed eye-lid. That eye! It looked at the moment like the eye of a serpent, it was so cruel — an evil eye.

For a pang of jealousy more bitter than a serpent's tooth, had shot through his heart, and seemed to turn his whole nature into gall — to venom rather, I should say.

His feelings for bad or for good were dangerously intense. His suffering under mortal pain of any sort, so sharply excessive, that jealousy and love were to him torments, such as we read of in the appalling histories of the old, old world, but such as we little expect to meet with now-a-days.

He turned pale — he turned black.

Edward sat gazing into the fire. He had relapsed into silence after that short outburst of joyous laughter, and he sat musing; his mind teeming with happy, loving thoughts; absorbed in the present fulness of his joy; thinking little of, and certainly having little apprehension as regarded the future.

His had been such a life of uninterrupted prosperity, that to be frustrated in his wishes, appeared as unnatural and impossible to him, as to some, alas, it appears, to succeed in theirs.

William, on the contrary, had little reason, from the unjoyous course of his own life, to expect much from fate. Yet, strange to say, in this instance he *did* rely upon it, and with a security which took to his mind the appearance of a fatality. Accustomed to ob-

serve himself as well as others, he could in no other way account for this strong prevision or presentiment — call it what you will — which assured him that the inappreciable prize was destined to be his — and with him jealousy already took rather the form of that of an affianced man, unjustly disturbed in the possession of his treasure, than of a rival contending with a rival upon equal terms.

William knew himself pretty well; yet he was not aware at this moment of the source from which his feelings of assurance and security sprung — he attributed them to fatality — that fatality is the fatality of the strong man — a determined will.

A determined will is as a spiritual magnetism, subduing all things to itself.

“What’s the matter with you, William?” cried Edward, turning suddenly round, and perceiving the change in his brother’s countenance, “what on earth can be the matter with you? — You look almost black; I should rather say — yellow green.”

And he laughed again, and then more seriously added:

“Really, brother, I am afraid you are ill; and yet you don’t look so much ill as odd — angry, rather, I should say — if there were anything to make you angry.”

“I am neither ill nor angry,” answered William, coldly.

“Well, you are uneasy, then, I suppose. — Is it upon my account, brother? I have often observed that nobody can fall in love but it puts everybody else out of humour, and every bystander has some reason or other for abusing it. — Now, do speak out

— But really, what possible objection can there be to my falling in love? — Nay,” for now his thoughts began to travel far, “to my offering my hand and my heart to Lady Emma Mordaunt.”

“None in the least, if she will accept them.”

“And why should she not? — I a’nt a very ugly fellow; and I bear my blushing honours thick around me — and, I assure you, she did not look as if she hated me altogether — and then — as to her friends — I am my father’s eldest son and heir — and I shall have the fortune of a prince — and the Marquis, it is said, is not over rich, and there is an immense family of children, and so — and so — I am not going to be down-hearted about the matter, but mean to set to with all my might, and conquer or die in the attempt.”

William shuddered as if struck with a sudden chill, as if some one were walking over his grave — a grave.

“Well, you are a strange fellow; I can but half understand you,” said Edward, “I never saw such a face as yours was just now. It was as if you had suddenly put on a hideous tragic mask. If we were at this moment between the tropics, I should say you had been suddenly stricken with the plague — but I’m no doctor; and here come my horses. — Seriously though, William,” he added kindly, as he rose to go, “if I were you, and I did not feel better soon, I would send for a doctor, for you look indeed very bad.”

And, so saying, he left the room.

Opening the door, again, he looked in, and said:

"But I never told you what a lucky dog I was — I am going with Algernon to call at the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux's — So consider me as a lost man."

CHAPTER V.

But not a voice replied; no answer came from the darkness.

And when the echoes had ceased, like a sense of pain was the silence.

LONGFELLOW.

"No — no — no.

"She is mine, not his.

"Such love as mine! — such love as his!

"Can there be a doubt?

"Do not all women love because they are loved? — and what woman can resist the intensity of a love like mine?

"Let him flutter about her; let him do his best, his worst; he shall not, nay, he dare not. If he were once to know what passes in this heart — the agonies, the fierce paroxysms of which it is capable — he dare not — He dare as soon send a pistol bullet through my brain, as drive the poignard in!

"No — I care not.

"I shall seek no introduction at present; I want no introduction. A meeting under the common vulgar arrangements of the great world's life, I do not want, and could not bear; but I shall get to her some way. It will come, sooner or later it will come, and she will be mine —

"Mine! —

"And what did he say last?

"What had he the cruelty to say?

"That he was assured of success because he was the heir?

"He would buy her, then.

"Purchase that heart, more precious than the chrysolite, with his gold. — Yet, stay, not so. — It was her parents that were to be thus bribed — but that I envy him not; I would not owe the possession of one lovely auburn tress upon her head to gold!

"She must love me for myself — only for myself — or, dear as she is, she is not for me."

Alnaschar!

He spurned in fancy at the daughter of the Grand Vizir.

In this wild manner, the man of thought, the man of such mental power and force of character, kept talking to himself, until at length exhausted with, and half ashamed of his over excited thoughts, he rose from his seat, resolving to go into the Park and get a little fresh air.

To the Park he went, and walked by the side of Rotten Row, and amused himself with watching the equestrians, young and old men, and slight, pretty girls, that were killing the morning, pacing up and down there. Girls do not, in my opinion, look particularly well on horseback — it requires a certain peculiar spirit to sympathise with the horse, to ride easily and well, in order to look as charming and agreeable as when otherwise engaged.

Very few of the young lady equestrians riding that morning fulfilled these conditions; and William, who now began to be an observer of young ladies, saw nothing much to please him. When lo! three horses were seen advancing; the party consisting of two gentlemen, and one young lady.

The gentlemen rode but very indifferently; they evidently were not particularly accomplished horsemen, but with the young lady it was different. She sat her horse with the most easy grace, and there was a charming expression of enjoyment in her face, over which a sweet westerly wind was blowing, lifting the tresses of her beautiful hair, and giving a bright glow of health to the countenance.

She had been but too lovely as he had seen her the night before, in her evening full dress, but she was infinitely more charming now. Then she had appeared to him as the dazzling inhabitant of a higher world, and he had felt inclined to worship her as a divinity, but he saw her now in a far dearer light — as a sweet young girl — a sweet, lively, natural, laughing girl.

And he turned paler than ever.

She was talking gaily to both her companions, first addressing one and then the other, and William, who was beginning, with a strange instinct, to grow knowing in the affairs of the heart, perceived with joy, how openly and unaffectedly she smiled upon and chatted with Edward, and then turned away to laugh with her brother; whilst her beautiful horse, as if proud of his burden, pranced and curvetted beneath her, with arching neck and hoofs so daintily touching, as scarcely to touch the ground, and she yielding easily to every motion as if horse and rider had been but one.

And so the little group passed and repassed several times; at a pace with which William easily kept up, as he walked along the path and watched them.

At length he overheard a few words as they approached the side where he was, and the voice was that of Lord Algernon; he was telling his sister that now she must go home, "for," he said, "there were certain calls to be made and engagements that he must keep," and he yawned as he spoke, — for he was one who liked not to be put out of his way, and whose apparent good-nature was speedily exhausted; and he was beginning to be tired of playing chaperon to his pretty sister and his friend, and wanted to be somewhere else where he might act principal himself.

So they turned their horses' heads, and went down Rotten Row, intending to leave the Park by Stanhope Gate. A considerable crowd was collected there at the time, and the horses got separated a little, the two gentlemen proceeding first and the young lady following a little way behind, having been unavoidably delayed by the press. But just as she was about to pass through the gate, a carriage at full speed, drawn by a couple of furious horses, whom the coachman was vainly endeavouring to hold in, came dashing past and, at such a rate that she must have been inevitably upset, had not a strong hand seized hold of her bridle, and forcibly pushing back her horse — almost throwing him upon his haunches — rescued her.

The carriage rushed on, and so near was it, that the wheel just grazed her horse's head as it passed like a whirlwind by.

There is always something fearful in a narrow escape, and the young lady turned very pale and trembled so violently that she could scarcely sit her

horse. The animal, too, was shuddering and quivering and evidently in extreme terror.

In the meantime, the gentleman who had seized the bridle continued to retain it, patting and endeavouring to soothe the terrified horse with words and caresses, but he did not look up at the young rider. He seemed anxiously providing for her safety by quieting the animal, but he looked not up at herself.

Reader, did you ever know what it is to dally with a letter — some long-expected letter — bearer of tidings of blessedness unutterable. How the heart plays with itself, and will not break the seal for very joy. The moment of expectation is so sweet, the security of certainty so exquisite, that we love to prolong it — to rest, as it were, upon that, before rushing into the full tide of overwhelming happiness.

Thus it was with William Aubrey.

The time was then come — the inevitable moment — that moment which he had felt assured would sooner or later arrive — he held the bridle of her horse, he had saved her life. He was privileged to look up, to gaze, to speak, released from chilling, conventional forms. Nature and circumstance had brought them together — one of those circumstances of terror and emergency had occurred which break down custom and restore us for a moment to nature's primitive freedom, — but he paused. He delayed to taste the fulness of his joy; his heart was already so overflowing with emotion that it almost choked him.

But a fair head was now bent down to him as

there he stood, still holding the bridle, and a sweet voice faltering with recent terror, uttered these words:

"I thank you very much, Sir. You have saved my life."

Then he looked up and their eyes met, and the expression that was in his seemed to penetrate her very soul.

A strange feeling it was — of terror — of fatality!

She turned a little pale, and then a little red, and made as if she would have withdrawn her bridle from his grasp, but he said quietly:

"I think your horse is too much frightened — you had better let me lead him through the gate and accompany you till you rejoin your companions, one of whom is my brother. — Oh, here they are!"

The two men were riding up in haste, both looking vexed at themselves for their momentary inattention.

Lord Algernon, as is usual with men of his temper, vexed with every one else besides.

"What the deuce, Emma, have you been about? and what are you doing?" and he glanced angrily, first at her, and then still more angrily at her companion. Her companion, however, kept his ground, still holding her bridle and still soothing and caressing the trembling horse.

"It is Captain Aubrey's brother," said Lady Emma, in a low voice.

"But how comes all this to pass? And what have you been about?"

"He has saved my life, I believe — You have

saved my life, I am sure;" again bending down to him. "May I introduce you to my brother? — This is my brother Algernon. Mr. Aubrey — did not you say you were Mr. Aubrey?"

Lord Algernon gave a somewhat stiff bow — anything but grateful felt he — his sister had got into some awkward scrape and laid him under an obligation. He hated scrapes and detested obligations. Lady Emma felt annoyed at his manner, and her voice trembled a little as she added:

"I was in the greatest danger, and Mr. Aubrey saved my life — perhaps at the risk of his own."

"I ran no manner of risk," William said simply.

In spite of Lord Algernon's looks he still kept hold of the bridle.

In the mean time, Captain Aubrey had flung himself from his horse, and had come forward holding him by the rein; but the animal pulled and pranced, and he could with difficulty get towards Emma. William was the first to perceive this.

"Keep back, Edward," he said, with authority, "your horse is so unmanageable, that it may do mischief here — better mount again, and keep him in order."

Captain Aubrey answered by throwing the rein to a lad who was passing by, and he was at Lady Emma's side in an instant.

"What has been the matter? What has happened?" he cried, trembling with anxiety.

"It was an overdriven carriage, through the gate — Mr. Aubrey — he is your brother, I believe, — was just in time to save me."

Edward looked at his brother gratefully, and said

in a low tone which reached only William's ear, "God bless you for this!"

He envied him, oh, how he envied him for having saved his darling, but it was a generous envy. As for being jealous, the idea entered not his head.

"I see no use in staying here all day," Lord Algernon now somewhat rudely broke in. "Can't you manage your horse yourself, Emma, and let us go home."

"If you will take my advice, my lord," said William, "you will let me lead the animal through the streets. It has evidently been dreadfully frightened, and seems inclined to start and shudder at every noise."

"Let *me* do that," cried Edward, endeavouring to lay hold of the rein.

"No —" putting his hand back, as one who had a right to decide upon what should be done — and he felt he had a right, the life he had saved, was it not henceforth *his*? "No, your vocation is not exactly the stable, Edward, and I doubt whether I shall not in this case prove the better esquire. Shall we go?" appealing to Lord Algernon.

"By all means, if you please."

So Edward, a good deal mortified, and inclined, for the first time in his life, to quarrel with his brother, remounted his steed, and followed at rather a sulky distance; whilst William quietly led Lady Emma's horse through the streets, preceded by Lord Algernon, who troubled himself not once to look back and see how they were going on.

They had to go through many streets, for the

Marquis of Hurstmonceaux's house was one of those large palaces among the groves and lawns of the Regent's Park.

At last they arrived, the horses stopped, servants appeared, and Lady Emma was assisted to dismount.

She had kept up her courage pretty well until then, but no sooner did her foot touch the earth, than she felt dizzy and sick, and she reeled and would have fallen, had not William Aubrey caught her upon his arm.

Lord Algernon was dismounting from his horse; Edward was disentangling himself — for that is the proper phrase — from his, so William Aubrey had the advantage again, and before the two other young men were at liberty, he with Lady Emma on his arm, was mounting the high flight of steps which led to her father's hall door.

Here, just as they were crossing the threshold, the two others joined them; but not before her eyes had again met his deep passionate gaze, — that look with so strange a power in it.

Lord Algernon had recovered his good humour by this time; and, with his good temper, his good manners were restored; which, young aristocrat though he was, were sadly to seek whenever he happened to be — as he very often did happen to be — out of sorts; so he courteously came up to William Aubrey, and thanked him for the service he had done, and desired to relieve him from further trouble, as he phrased it. He sent for his sister's maid, and consigning her to the attendant's care, asked William to

come up to the drawing room, "In order that I may present you to my mother," he added.

William Aubrey, whose feelings were in a strange state by this time, most unwillingly yielded his charge to her brother's hands, but there was no remedy. So Lady Emma, accompanied by her maid, tried to cross the hall, and go up stairs, but she tottered so much that she could scarcely stand. And now, it was Edward's turn. He was frank and impetuous, and accustomed to dart forward to his object, be that object small or great, in a drawing room or upon the ocean, and so he rushed past his brother and her brother, without ceremony, and hurried towards Emma, crying — "You can scarcely stand, take my arm."

And she laid her arm within his, doing this so willingly, so confidingly, and lifting up her eyes towards his, with such a sweet and peaceful reliance written in them, and such a gentle, smile lighting up her languid face, that it was only too charming.

"Lean upon me — you don't lean upon me. Lean upon me," he kept saying in a low voice. That clear, manly voice of his was so inexpressibly sweet, when the tones were softened by emotion. — "You don't lean upon me."

And she did lean upon him; and her arm was closely pressed — pressed close to his heart; and she felt that heart beating so wildly. And again she looked up into his face, and there she met all that woman so loves to meet — sincerity and devotion, and the high spirit of the man, subdued to utter tenderness. And yet the *man* was still there. Edward was not, as too many unfortunate lovers are, deprived of the power of

making himself interesting or acceptable, by the very agitation arising from the force of his attachment. The spirit which had carried him through many of the great emergencies of life, and triumphed over difficulties which might have appalled the bravest, was softened and melted, but not overcome, by his present feelings.

They were of so generous and animating a nature!

There is a sympathetic instinct in these things. Emma, who possessed more than the usual share of such precious gifts, felt attached to Edward Aubrey by the sweetest feelings of love and reliance; they seemed to understand each other at once.

You may see how it is, by the very attitude and expression of the two figures as you follow them, and, certainly, the power of "elective attraction" was exhibited, in its full perfection here. Observe them as they go up the wide stairs together, having dropped the Abigail upon the way; who, being no longer wanted, had taken up her lady's hat, which had fallen upon the hall floor, and followed discreetly, at a little distance behind.

Edward and the young lady parted at the door which separated the gallery, at the head of the stairs, from the little side passage which led to Lady Emma's apartments, then, returning to the party he had left, the three young men entered the drawing-room together. In this apartment they found the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux sitting bonnetted and cloaked, waiting for her carriage.

Lord Algernon immediately went up to her, ushering in, or rather pushing forwards, William Aubrey.

"Mother, let me present Mr. William Aubrey to you — brother to Captain Aubrey, whom I had the

honour to introduce here an hour or two ago, as so distinguished by his actions at sea. This present gentleman has a nearer claim upon your favour — inasmuch as he has achieved great actions by land — and has just saved your fair daughter, Lady Emma's life, by his daring bravery."

"How! What do you say, Algernon?" exclaimed the Marchioness, without betraying any great emotion. However, she rose and returned the rather shy and reserved salute of William Aubrey, which followed upon Lord Algernon's half ironical introduction. "I am sure I am extremely indebted to you, Sir, but," turning to her son, "pray tell me how it all came to pass."

And with the instinctive dread of younger sons proper to prudent mothers, as she spoke, she cast an anxious glance upon the new comer. The glance satisfied her. She mentally settled it with herself that there was little to be called attractive in the cold and somewhat repulsive countenance before her. It contrasted most unfavourably, or rather favourably, with the handsome, happy, animated aspect of his elder brother, who stood just behind him; and, she secretly rejoiced that for once the provoking course which nature is for ever taking in such matters, seemed reversed in her favour; for the elder brother, the heir to enormous wealth, was in this instance as superior to the younger in every personal endowment, as he was in other advantages. She gave vent to one sigh of relief and satisfaction, and then turned to William Aubrey with greater cordiality — thinking he looked delightfully bilious and disagreeable — and thanked him warmly for the service he had done.

"Though what that is, I don't know in the least," concluded she.

"Nor I either," cried Lord Algernon, breaking into a laugh, "only we found Emma and her horse, both of them in a great mess — trembling and shaking — half out of their senses with fright — and Mr. Aubrey holding the young lady's bridle, and she crying, and saying, that he had saved her life — for which good office not only your ladyship, but half the town, will be ready to cover him with laurels; for what could this London do just now without the beautiful Emma?"

"I am sure I thank you exceedingly, Sir," began the Marchioness; "but how was it?"

"The merest trifle, Madam. A carriage with runaway horses, dashing through Stanhope Gate, just as Lady Emma was quitting the Park. — The sum of my merits amounts merely to this, that I happened to be standing there — laid hold of the bridle — and pushed the horse out of the way."

"How romantic girls are!" cried Lord Algernon; "Emma would have it that her life had been saved at the risk of the gentleman's own."

"That makes no difference in our obligation to Mr. Aubrey," said the Marchioness politely. "But what were Captain Aubrey and Lord Algernon Mordaunt doing all the time?" she said, turning to Edward and smiling upon him.

"I am ashamed to say — quite ashamed, Madam!" cried Edward. "We seamen are such awkward brutes, especially on horseback — I was as helpless as a child. — If it had not been for William, I do not know what would have become of us. — Such a hor-

rible, horrible business! It makes one shudder to think of it."

"Say no more, Edward, I beg;" his brother began with a good deal of impatience; "the whole matter was the veriest — the most insignificant trifle . . . except as regarded Lady Emma's safety," he added.

"A rather important exception," replied the Marchioness, laughing. "However, all's well that ends well; and I quite agree with Mr. Aubrey, that the less said about such disagreeable things, and the sooner they are forgotten, the better. One consequence, however, will, I hope, be permanent — the pleasure of Mr. Aubrey's acquaintance. I have already given you a ticket, I think, for my ball, Captain Aubrey — Mr. Aubrey will accept another. I shall be happy to see you both upon the 15th."

A little more conversation in the usual style — the Marchioness's carriage was announced, and the young men rose to go. They all three went down stairs together, but Lord Algernon was called back.

"Only just to bid you bring the elder one — Captain Aubrey, I mean — to dinner to-morrow. Eight o'clock; be punctual, I pray. Your father hates late hours."

"And the other?"

"Oh, no need to ask the other; a card for my ball is quite acknowledgment enough of what he has done. But, Algernon," — as he was making his way to the door — "you are *certain* Captain Aubrey is the elder son; the other looks ten years older."

"Twin brothers; but I believe Edward is the elder."

"Only *believe*. What do you mean — Can there be any mistake? — Don't be foolish, Algernon. Tell me

the truth at once — This is not a time for you to indulge your too absurd fondness for mystifying.... I say the other looks at least ten years older."

"Poor, dear mama! what a pass she is in," said Lord Algernon, going up to the Marchioness, and familiarly patting her cheek. "What *can* it matter which is the elder, when there is only half an hour between them?"

"Do you mean by this that Mr. Aubrey's fortune is to be divided? — I thought it was all to go to the eldest son — *that* would alter things, indeed. In that case it would be but a plebeian fortune after all."

"It is not to be divided, Ma'am, and it all goes to the eldest son — and it will be not a plebeian but a princely fortune — and put Emma up for sale when and where you will, you will hardly get a better price for her, that I can assure you of, at least. — I know so much from unquestionable authority."

"But are you certain which of the two is the eldest son?" reiterated the mother, anxiously. "I cannot help having my doubts upon the matter."

"Why, I told you, did I not?"

"Yes; but you are so heedless, and he looks so much older."

"Well, then, go and ask his father."

"Provoking boy!"

"Nay, you won't believe *me*."

The Marchioness began to look vexed and angry.

"Now, what will you give me, mother mine," said he, coaxingly, "if I put you out of your pain? — Nothing for nothing is my maxim; and I am such a poor devil! and my lord is so needy, or so stingy — what

is a fellow to do? I must have a thousand pounds on Thursday. — Will you get it for me?"

"Oh, Algernon! Algernon! where is this to end?"

"In a cannon-ball knocking my head off, I suppose. But come, Ma'am, be generous and be politic. Get this money for me, and I'll not only tell you which the eldest son is, but run him down for you — and Emma's as sure of him as ever deer-stalker was of his prey. Otherwise — mind, I promise nothing — I am forced to sell my services," he went on, with a harsh, careless laugh. "Service is no disgrace, though thieving is — and I must either serve, beg, or steal, and that's the long and short of it."

"Well, well, I'll see about it — but your father is hard-pushed just now."

"The more the necessity for you to secure a rich husband for Emma, and beware of mistakes — Things are just upon the balance between the two men at present. They are both in love with her; any fool may see that — and suppose you should encourage her to fall in with the wrong man! There would be a pretty commence."

"Algernon, you are too provoking — you are cruel."

"Mother, I am poor and penniless, and at my wits' end."

"Well, well!"

"Promise. Give me your hand upon it — a thousand pounds next Thursday, and the right man comes to dinner to-morrow."

"I promise — and here is my hand upon it; but you are a sad, sad, naughty boy."

"Thank you, dear Ma'am. Well, then, it's all right, and the Captain's the man."

CHAPTER VI.

Ah! thou art young, and life is fresh and gay,
And thine eye glistens, and thy heart beats high;
No fear to check, no tear to wipe away,
No retrospect to sadden with a sigh:
Strong in thy youth and happiness, beware.

MRS. ACTON TINDAL.

THE two Aubrey's left the door together.

Edward was about to put his arm within William's and walk up the street with him. His heart was full; he wanted to talk over his feelings with his brother and his friend.

But William shook the arm off.

"What's the matter?" cried Edward, now for the first time perceiving the cloud upon William Aubrey's face. "William, what is the matter with you? My dear fellow, you look quite ill; I hope you were not hurt in any way whilst saving that life — that life more precious than all in the Universe besides. I hope you were not hurt, dear fellow; you look quite ill — won't you go home? What is it?"

His brother made no answer. He only turned his face homewards. His heart was full of bitterness. Jealousy, that scourge of love, was converting his nature to gall. Once he turned round and looked at his brother, as if to satiate his soul with the cruel sense of his pre-eminent beauty and worth. For alas! in addition to his other cruel feelings, there came upon him for the first time a sense of his brother's real

superiority in worth — not intellectual it is true, but far better, moral worth.

This conviction had been brought home to him by the contrast between the generous confidence and affection of Edward and his own baseness, envy, almost hatred. — The conviction that this rival brother had the advantage not only as regarded the gifts of fortune, but that man to man he was his superior, pressed upon him for the first time in his life.

The wretched depression of his spirits as he thus thought, was almost insupportable. This conviction was one of those sudden unaccountable impressions which rush into the mind we know not whence or wherefore, and seem at once to change all its views and relations. A few hours ago, and William was exulting in the idea, that, however inferior in worldly prospects he might be, in all the higher qualities he was his brother's superior; and that the claim he so wildly and fiercely asserted to the possession of that sweet girl's heart, was justified by his own merits, moral and intellectual. Hitherto he had regarded his brother as amiable in truth, but thoughtless, wild, and shallow. Edward had from boyhood been prone to make escapades and involve himself in various scrapes, which had cost his father both anxiety and money, and though these errors were powerless to weaken his parent's partiality — for unreasonable partiality is proof against everything — still William had the satisfaction in the midst of his mortifications of cultivating a proud feeling that he deserved a different lot — that man to man he was the superior, and that weighed in an impartial balance he would not have been found wanting; but that had arisen within him,

as he stood watching those two ascending the stairs — as he entered the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux's drawing-room — which startled him and made him recoil at his own heart.

The serpent was suddenly revealed there. A power of evil, an intense capacity of hatred — a resolute and blasphemous determination to rebel against fate, destiny, providence, God — whatever name he might choose to give to that external force, which we all feel surrounding us, and to which we must sooner or later submit, appalled him — and whilst all within was in this raging tumult of unhallowed thought — there stood his brother, with his honest, ingenuous face, beaming, as it seemed to him, like that of an angel — all happiness and goodness.

The irritation he felt, when Edward, in so affectionate and confiding a manner, laid hold of his arm, was insupportable. — There are humours — of the demon — of man's worst adversary, they must be — when the very merit of those we envy is only an additional cause of aversion and hate — when we have not even the excuse — the only palliation possible for the base passion — namely, a sense of injustice — and our evil feelings are but the more intensely bitter because we cannot disguise from ourselves that the happy one deserves his good fortune, and that the converse is justly ours.

Every blessing that could fall upon Edward he *did* at this moment deserve; and that William knew and felt with intensity. Whilst *he!*...

"I'm not ill," he said, shaking off Edward's arm somewhat roughly, "Why will you bother me with

supposing I am ill? — I hate to be thought ill — let me alone — I am only out of humour.”

“Out of humour, true enough!” said Edward, letting go his hold. And I confess if it were any one but yourself, who are not given to be pettish, I should not be surprised. Colder thanks for a great service I think few men ever received — but I imagined that you would have disregarded it. You are a philosopher you know — philosophers should despise such things. The marchioness is a mere heartless woman of the world — *that* one may see with half an eye. Pooh! pooh, man! How can you let such nonsense vex you?”

“I wish *you* would not talk nonsense — magnifying the ‘service’ as you call it, till it becomes ridiculous.... Really, Edward, you have lived so long out of the world, that you make yourself absurd by these romantic exaggerations — and what is not quite fair, make others appear absurd also.”

“I said nothing particularly absurd or exaggerated that I am aware of — but true enough you *are* out of humour, as you say — and so, I will, for the present, wish you a good morning.”

And this saying he turned away chilled, vexed, and disappointed. He had loved and honoured his brother from a child, the proof he had just given of spirit and presence of mind had filled him with admiration, and with almost enthusiastic gratitude — and to have his demonstrations repelled in this rude manner, not only wounded him as a brother, but offended him as a man.

He felt hurt and irritated and by that one whom, alone of all in this great metropolis he looked upon as

a friend, — and this sudden repulse, and the consequent reaction of his feelings made him wretchedly uncomfortable. What could it be that had thus suddenly started up as it were between them? Whence this coldness and irritation? He could not understand it. Was it in truth mere temper and caprice? Was the man so esteemed from earliest childhood, for the equality and firmness of his temper, subject like more imperfect beings, to the influences of mere humour; and was he beloved so little that they were to be visited upon him!

Edward was high spirited, and possessed abundance of common sense, but his feelings were warm. He could not easily be provoked, and he tried hard to bear the thing patiently; but he determined not to meet William again till the irritation upon his own side, at least, had in some degree subsided, so he resolved to spend the remainder of the day from home. And this he did in spite of the conversation in the morning; and though he knew that his father had a dinner party that day, at which it would be a considerable disappointment if he were not present.

But his was still a character of impulse — and the more he thought of his brother's words and manner, the less he found it possible to meet him with cordiality. Go home just at present, therefore, he could not, and he would not. He was sorry to disappoint his father, but the thing could not be helped.

What to do with himself? Why, go and dine at the club, and make the best excuses he could for himself in the morning. And so to the Junior United Service Club he went, and sat down feeling uncomfortable enough, and ordered his chop, and took up

the newspaper — trying to read, but comprehending not one word.

Sometimes the sweet smiles of Lady Emma were before him, and then it was as when the sun breaks out over the clouded landscape of an April day; but most often his thoughts took another turn.

He ran over in recollection the events of his, as yet, short life. Home and its history. His father, and his mother, and the loved companion of his childhood — his brother William.

And then his heart swelled as it had often done before, with a generous pity, as he contrasted the fond partiality of which from infancy he had been the object, with the checks and coldness which too often had been his brother's portion. Things which the warm heart of Edward had felt sensibly for him, and had endeavoured to repair by the strength of his own affection; and he had believed, because it seemed so natural, that his feelings met from William with an equal return.

But he was not aware how far more hard was William's task. Pity is a sweet sentiment; easily excited and pleasant to experience — to weep with those that weep, interferes with no self-love — but to rejoice with those that rejoice; — to look without envy upon the advantages possessed by another — whilst the bosom is perhaps rankling with the sense of injustice to ourselves, this demands the true heroism of the spirit — that diviner form of noble, universal charity, of which the word "love" is but a narrow and feeble expression.

Had Edward guessed the real cause of his brother's altered manner, he would have been greatly relieved,

and could at once have pardoned it; but an idea of the truth never entered his head; in its place strange suspicions began to arise, too painful to be endured, too base to be indulged — they should not be indulged. He would not do his brother the injustice to believe him to be jealous of his position and advantages; he who had, till now, shown himself so nobly exempt from the unworthy sentiment, even when there had been far greater occasion to excite it. No, no, — a little temper, a little ill humour — all men were subject to such things — that was it. Perhaps he *had* said something *inconvenant* in Regent's Park — he could not remember — but he dared to say something had passed which had offended his brother's nice sense of propriety — best think no more about it — all would be forgotten upon both sides, after a night's sleep.

So he applied himself to the study of his newspaper again, and was getting a little more interested, and beginning to feel more easy and as usual; when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, he turned round, it was Lord Algernon.

“Right glad to have found you! I thought you were gone home, pious young man! to dine, like a good boy, with your governor. — I despaired of catching you to-night; and yet I wanted to speak to you abominably and this it is,” sitting down and lowering his tone: “you must know, Edward, that I have very unguardedly and foolishly got myself engaged to play a match at whist, at our Club, there. Now, I am afraid that the fellows are rather more than a match for me, so I am looking hard for my partner. Now, you are a clever hand at this, as at every other

thing you set about: and so I want you to accept the honoured office."

"I dislike playing matches," answered Edward; "you know I always get off such things if I can. Excuse me this time — besides, to tell truth, I am very particularly ill-adapted for the sort of thing to-night — my head aches; and I am so confoundedly stupid and out of humour, that I should revoke or something of that sort before three deals were over.... Let me off to-night, Mordaunt."

"Nonsense! you are only hipped, only wool-gathering, and in — in Nonsense! man — you are the best player I know; and I counted upon you, or I never would have plunged in, neck and heels, as I have. Come, be good natured, Aubrey — don't disappoint me this once — and I'll tell you what I have got for you — an invitation from the Marchioness to dine with us to-morrow! You'll come — won't you?"

"Come! — thank you —. Certainly I will come — but what of this match, Algernon: I wish I could persuade you to give up playing matches — at least, betting upon your own side, as in days of yore I have seen you do. I hope there are no heavy bets depending upon this affair."

"Oh! a mere trifle, as far as I am concerned. You know I have renounced high play long ago. A pitiful trifle, merely to pass the time away — one must kill time," stretching himself and yawning, "some way or other. One must kill time, or time will kill us — that I know. What *can* one find to do? So come along — let us have a dinner and a bottle of claret at *the* club. Come along — there's a good fellow;"

and putting his arm under Edward's, he rather dragged than led him away.

Edward yielded. Alas! he was too ready to yield to his own easy obliging temper; besides, was not Lord Algernon Lady Emma's brother?

And now they have dined, and each having taken a few glasses of wine, they are gone up stairs, and Edward has been introduced to the scene within the embroidered curtains of the *portièrre*, and he has also been introduced to two somewhat sinister-looking men, who are presented under the names of Captain Locke and Mr. Hargreves. These gentlemen are strangers to Edward, who, thinking of other things, and almost mechanically, has suffered himself to be set down at the whist table, and is now cutting for deal.

And so they begin to play.

Edward, once fairly in for it, endeavoured to collect his thoughts, and give his entire attention to what he was about. He loved this particular game, as he loved everything which taxed his powers of calculation, judgment, and memory. Alas! that his habits of life and education had not furnished him, when his professional exertions were at a stand, with higher objects upon which to exercise these good gifts possessed by him in no ordinary degree. But alas! alas! what numbers around us are, every day that passes over our heads, betrayed into evil courses, merely by the same miserable want of something to do.

Edward observed with pleasure that Lord Algernon kept his word as to betting, and was very moderate in

this respect, at which proceeding the two stranger gentlemen, as he thought, looked a good deal surprised and disappointed. And they now and then cast side glances at the other tables, where, to judge by appearances, very high play was going on, as if they felt that they themselves were wasting time.

They played, nevertheless, with a skill and attention which seemed to be habitual to them, whilst Lord Algernon, to the astonishment of Edward, never played worse in his life. Not that he made any very obvious blunders, but the whole style of his play that evening was greatly below his average force, and this, of course, put Edward out; he could not understand his partner's game. The luck, too, seemed to go against them; in short, the match was lost, at which Lord Algernon rose from the table, with an air of great vexation. He paid the stakes and bets by a cheque upon his father's banker, instead of upon his own agent; assuring the gentlemen, with a haughty laugh — as they hesitated a little as to receiving it — that he had credit at that house to cover a much larger sum than the one in question — adding that, if they did not like to take his paper, he could give them his note of hand, which he would cash if they would take the trouble to call at his father's house any time that evening, or the following day.

The cheque was received without further demur; and then Lord Algernon put his arm under Edward's.

"I never saw you play worse," he said, speaking loud enough to be heard by every one present.

"Nay — I did my best — but I told you I was not in the right humour. And give me leave to say,

if I was not in force, I know another who was a good deal further below his usual mark."

"Pooh! I played very well — I never recollect playing better," and involuntarily he squeezed Edward's arm.

Edward suddenly looked up into his companion's face — interrogatively — as much as to say — 'what do you mean by that?'

But the face was turned away, and the arm instantaneously relaxed, and Lord Algernon drew Edward, without further parley, out of the room, and into the street, and when there, after a little pause he said:

"I never was more vexed in my life than to lose this match, and to those two fellows — and lucky I did not get heated, and bet in the mad way I sometimes do. It provokes one to lose his money to a couple of snobs."

"I wonder you choose to play with snobs. I think I never saw a more complete couple of such in my life. — Who are they?"

"Oh! they are not nobodies, as you may think — they are admitted into society — you see them everywhere. One is the man who has made untold sums in India; the other is heir to the great contractor — he who realized his million, they say, by victualling his Majesty's navy. I don't suppose his beef was exactly Scotch ox — rather hard of digestion, some say — but what of that? Seamen must not be dainty — and a millionaire has no sins. But if he don't take care, they say, his son will get through the million in no time — not if he plays with the luck he did to-night, though."

"Misery makes a man acquainted with strange company, and so does the whist table," said Edward, "I wish one had anything better to do."

"What can a man do better whilst he is ashore? — What can poor devils of seamen find to do better? — At least, I for one cannot — I can't be dangling all day in ladies' drawing-rooms, or be disgracing myself in Rotten Row by sitting my horse like a tailor. What on earth is there for men like you or me to do but amuse ourselves?"

"What indeed!"

William Aubrey went home in no better humour than his brother.

Nay, worse, for he was angry with himself, as well as with all the world — out of sorts as regarded all around and within him.

Those two figures ascending the stairs together haunted him: and he read in that little group, as in some hieroglyphical scroll, that which made his heart die within him.

Besides, he knew the world well enough to understand all that was implied in the Marchioness's manner; and never had he so bitterly felt the immensity of the distance which custom and prejudice had placed between himself and his brother. And, I think it is not till love mingles its interests with those of money, that an earnest mind like the one before us cares about it. Most young people are disinterested enough as regards mere wealth, till the possession of it or the want of it affects their prospects as regards the heart.

True enough William had long been alive to the position in which he was placed by general opinion, and by his father's decided views as regarded the rights of primogeniture, views which Mr. Aubrey carried to the utmost extent to which a proud and ambitious temper can lead. — From a mere child he had been made to feel this, and in a manner few children are capable of feeling such things; but now those sensations began to assume a bitterness, and to excite an exasperation hitherto unknown, and which frightened even himself.

He looked upon himself as an outcast — excluded — shut out from the dearest objects of the heart by his inflexible destiny.

What was he? — what could he ever be?

Should he toil in an ungrateful profession — pass all the best years of life in arduous exertions and the lonely solitude of heart — looked down upon with civil contempt — as a thing most carefully to be watched and avoided by those he alone cared to interest or please? Forbidden even the endeavour to make himself acceptable to her, whom he had thought — whom he still thought — he might have had the power to win.

But what — granted that she might have been won to love him — what as things stood had he to offer? — The miserable pittance of a few hundreds a-year, and — love! — Love in a cottage! — a lot such as love in a cottage appears to the children of this world — of this our century. And this, whilst his brother — his rival brother — the brother sent into the world just half an hour before himself — possessed enormous expectations to lay at her feet — all that pride, pomp,

wealth, and luxury — which offering it was evident the mother would be too happy to accept.

What had he to offer to this lovely girl as the recompense for her heart? — if that heart on him were generously bestowed — how could he — and how could his brother — reward her?

Oh! true love is prodigal — is grasping. All the gems of the Indies seem too poor to lavish upon its idol: and the man who can despise wealth as regards himself, feels as a very beggar, when he wants the oblation to offer to the bright particular star he worships.

William Aubrey's feelings were partly noble, generous, and good; partly envious, jealous, and bad — but good or bad they were alike painful.

All was but pain — pain — pain.

Again he went into the Park, for he hated the idea of returning to his father's house: but here, as elsewhere, the crowds oppressed, and seemed almost to suffocate him. So he turned to Kensington Gardens, and plunged among the thickest and most unfrequented solitudes, there to indulge his misery.

The misery of a most lonely and despairing heart. He looked round. He wanted some one to whom he might open his heart; some tender female breast upon which he might repose!

Hitherto he had in every trouble sufficed to himself, but now he yearned for tenderness and sympathy. He was so utterly disheartened that he felt, what we have all more or less at times experienced, the necessity for seeking some arbiter of conscience — some other one to decide how far our feelings are justifiable or wrong —

to draw the moral line which we are too much agitated by passion to trace for ourselves.

Unhappy man. He had no mother, — he never had known what it was to have a mother. She who when living had claimed the name was now dead, but living or dead it was the same thing, she had been no mother to him. She had always professed — she seemed to take an unnatural pride in professing — how little she cared for him. As if she magnified her idol and justified her partiality, by under-valuing the unfortunate other child. People blamed her much, some even remonstrated, but the thoughtless and heartless woman seemed to imagine it quite excuse enough to reply with an unfeeling laugh, that for her part she wondered what any one could see in William to put him in comparison with Edward, whom she thought the most charming child she ever had seen. She could not help it, but there was something about the other which made him quite her pet aversion.

"I can't conceive what you all see in him," she would say.

Sister there was none, to make up in some degree for this cruel alienation; kind maidenly aunt, there was none to act the part of more than mother to the rejected child. Not one female relation had the boy sufficiently near to atone in some degree for the unnatural mother's injustice — yet was there one woman, obscure of station indeed, but strong and fervent in heart, who he felt had loved him from his cradle, with that love which passeth show — which finds little vent in words or caresses, but is deep, strong, and partial, and always there.

This woman, in short, was no other than his wet-nurse — Alice Craven.

“Nay, take him away, I cannot abide the sight of him. I never saw such an ugly little wretch of a thing in my life.”

“He appears to be a very delicate child, Madam,” said the doctor, looking with a benevolent interest at the wretched half-starved infant — “and I repeat what I before said — that the only chance of rearing him lies in sending him out of town immediately. The young woman I have brought with me is a highly respectable person — whom I have known all my life. She is married to Mr. Clarkson’s gamekeeper, and lives down in Sussex; and the fine air of those hills will give the child a better chance for life than anything else we can do — I am no advocate, in general, for wet-nursing, far less for sending infants out of their own nursery — out to nurse — as was the fashion some years ago — but this is an exceptional case.”

“Oh, dear! do just what you like — only leave me my own sweet, darling baby” — looking down with pride at the beautiful infant sleeping by her side — “and do what you will with the other — for I never shall abide him.”

“Madam,” said the Doctor gravely — “these are strange words.”

Upon which she opened wide her large, proud, amazed eyes, which said as plainly as eyes could speak, — “What! Do you presume to lecture me!”

He saw it would not do, but the look only confirmed him in his opinion. The infant could be no loser, as he thought, in any way, by being removed from such a mother, and his best chance for life lay in the fresh air of the country. This heartless young lady, when she saw him return a fine blooming boy, might learn better than to indulge this unnatural aversion.

I doubt whether he judged rightly in thus separating the parties, but it was done for the best.

"Would you like to see the wet nurse, Madam?"

"Well — yes — just as you please — Yes — I think I may as well see her — but I really am horribly exhausted — quite feverish, doctor, with all this fuss — Nurse, for goodness sake, give me something."

"Had not you better, my lady, dispense with seeing the young woman," begins the nurse in her most blandering tone. "Really, Madam, you seem quite overdone — Let me take away the sweet angel baby. — What, my prince! — are you opening your beautiful eyes — Look! and if they arn't just for all the wide world like his own dear mama's. Oh! but ain't he a precious jewel?"

Hugging him to her old deceitful bosom, whilst the doctor turned away thoroughly disgusted, and opened the door himself to introduce the young woman, whom he proposed to engage as wet nurse.

She was a handsome, intelligent, clever-looking young person, with every appearance of health, — though of dark, rather than florid complexion.

The lady cast her eyes carelessly upon her.

"Well, I should not think *you* would make such a capital wet nurse," she said.

"Pardon me, Madam," put in the doctor, "I will engage for that. This lady and I, Mrs. Craven," he said, "think that if it would be agreeable to you — you had better take the child altogether under your care — I mean carry him home with you — for he is a very delicate baby — and I doubt whether there is any chance of rearing him if we keep him in town. I have known you for some time — I think I may trust you — I rely upon your care," he said emphatically, almost severely, — "children in these cases have often not justice done to them — I shall expect, and I shall take care to know that you do justice to this child. — Recollect, that you will be answerable not only to his parents, but to *me*."

He looked at her with meaning.

She coloured a little — then she fixed a pair of fine intelligent eyes upon the doctor's face, and said with some spirit — "I understand you, Sir, — God do so to me, and more also if I do not my best by this baby."

"Madam, you may trust her implicitly," said the doctor, turning to the lady.

"La! what a solemn fuss you make about the commonest thing in the world — why everybody used to be brought up in this way — but I think the world is children mad at present." And she prepared to turn round and compose herself to sleep.

The doctor put the baby into the young woman's arm's. — "You may take him now," he said, — "my carriage shall carry you down to Mitcham Park — it is about twenty miles off, I think."

"Will you not please to kiss the child, Ma'am, before he goes?" asked the wet nurse.

"La! — yes — oh you horrid fright" — as the mantle was opened — "No, I positively can't kiss it — but, au revoir, my young man," stroking his little, thin, red hand, in a playful, careless sort of manner — "And if you can, good woman, bring me back something a little less horrid looking — Do you hear, young woman?"

She turned on her pillow, — the wet nurse pressed the poor unconscious baby to her heart. — The good doctor saw the action and was satisfied.

CHAPTER VII.

Under the greenwood tree,
Oh! who will live with me
And hear the sweet birds' note.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE rejected child was taken to the solitary hills of Sussex; the heart of the fostermother swelling high with all a woman's generous tenderness to the oppressed and unfortunate.

Closely nestling to her bosom she carried him, whilst her own boy, a little infant about the same age, was consigned to the arm of a female friend.

Right glad was Alice Craven to be allowed to carry the child home with her, for it had been a sore thing to leave her husband and have to seek a place of wet nurse in the great metropolis. But misfortune upon misfortune had visited the hapless gamekeeper. He had begun by losing, for him, a large sum of money — nearly the whole amount of his savings — through the failure of a bank in which they had been deposited. His master had been head partner in that bank; and in its shipwreck he himself was totally ruined. All his servants were discharged as a matter of course, and poor Craven found himself not only out of place, but suffering under rheumatic fever; the result of his exertions during the nights of a most inclement and tempestuous winter.

He had to enter the hospital. — His wife to live as she could. He had recovered at last, and they

had just lately obtained the place at Mr. Clarkson's, but the furnishing of their cottage and various expenses, incident to a long illness, had put them sadly behind in the world; — so that when their little one was born, it was resolved upon between them that, as the only chance of redeeming their circumstances, Alice should engage herself as wet nurse.

Dr. F., the great lying-in physician, was very well known to Alice; who had indeed been brought up from infancy in his house — serving there in various capacities until she left it, with the doctor's approbation, to be married to Craven, — a very respectable man, though nearly twenty years older than herself.

She loved him, nevertheless, with all the honest warmth of a true woman's heart, and as the doctor's carriage rolled pleasantly along, her joy at being restored to her husband so soon thus expanded itself to her friend and companion Hesther Baker, who had accompanied her from Sussex: —

"I am so glad, Hetty, to be back with Craven again, for he is mighty weakly still — and wants his wife very badly at times to look after him, — for he's one that never thinks of himself. — It was very, very good, and kind of Dr. F. to plan for me to bring the babe down here."

"So I think — and it will make Master Craven glad at his heart to have you back again — But, Alice, excuse an old friend for speaking her mind — I doubt whether having these *two* children to take care of, and no one to look after you or them — and one your own child, and the other an alien and a

stranger — I doubt but it may be a snare to you, Alice. — Blood is thicker than water. — It will be hard to do justice between them.”

“Do you think so?” pressing the little stranger, who now hung upon her breast. — “Do you think so? Well, I should have thought so an hour ago — thought so, if this child had been a fine, strong, happy, prosperous baby. But I’ll tell you what, Hetty, with such a mother as that one — I think the very beggar born on a dunghill is better off than he, in spite of his fine clothes — and even his very clothes look to me less handsome than his brother’s, and I feel the greatest pity for the poor weeny thing — and I can love it — aye just as I should, and would, have done if he and that little dark-eyed rascal there had been twins. — Yes, I can, and shall — you dear monkey — and you must remember, Sir, that if you are turned off to the cow, it’s all for your sake — and his, that’s better than ever you will be — that it’s done.”

“Well, I hope and I trust you’ll keep to it — and recollect what the doctor said as he put the babe into your arms in the carriage. — He’s a good, but he’s a dour man is Dr. F., if as how he thought any child of *his* was wronged by any nurse of his’n — it would be hard if he ever forgave it.”

“I wouldn’t offend him for all the whole world,” said Alice, with a look of dismay, — “and I’m half afraid to think, after what you say, that I have undertaken the charge of one of *his*. If any harm came to it, he’d never, never, forgive me — and who knows? It’s such a delicate-looking little darling. —

Oh Hetty, Hetty, I begin to wish I never had art or part in this business — and you, my little own one, what right had I to sell your flesh and blood?”

“Don’t fret — don’t fret, Alice — I’m sorry I said what I did — but one’s so afraid for those who enter into temptation — and it is a temptation — but you were right to do as you have done — a God above will keep you if you bravely try to do your duty. — Twins, aye twins! — That is the way to look upon it — you must try to think you had twins — Only one is the weakliest and the most to be pitied, and you must be just the opposite of that grand, bad lady — and just take the most care of it upon that account, — and do *more* for it, for fear you should do less by it.”

“And so I will — and so I shall — and you shall see, Hetty — you and the doctor and all the world, — whether I don’t turn him out when the year is over as fine a baby as the best.”

The gamekeeper’s cottage stood in a wood, which spread over a vast extent of hill and dale country, in the most secluded part of the centre of Sussex.

It was, indeed, a lonely spot, and rarely visited, for neighbours there were none within a couple of miles, and Alice and her husband passed weeks and even months without seeing human face, except of the underkeepers, with whom the young woman had little or nothing to do.

She found it all the more easy upon that account to perform her duty by these two children. Her husband excepted, they occupied all her time, and were

quite sufficient to fill her life with interests. Alice was one of those who live in their heart and affections — a woman of strong passions, and high imagination unusual in those of her position. In these she seemed to live, and what is rarely found with those in her rank of life, who seem to find it impossible to exist without society, and to consider dullness as the greatest affliction that can befall them, — she was quite content to dwell in the almost absolute solitude of the woodland wilderness around her.

She was, as I have said, a woman of intense feeling and great imagination — a poet unknown to herself. — The beauty of the woods — the sweet sounds and varied notes that are heard in the branches — the music of the wind — nature's great organ pipe — whether breathing softly among the branches, or in a roar of full diapason sweeping along the tops of the oaks — the primrose and wood anemonies of spring — wild briars and brown nuts of summer and autumn — and all the varied tints and changes of the fleeting, ever beautiful, year were to her sources of intense delight.

And pretty it was to see her, when the labour of the day was over, sitting by the side of a clear bubbling brook, that wandered through the moss and wild flowers, and lost itself in the thickets hard by the cottage. She, busy at her needle-work, — the picture of neatness and rural beauty, humming a low song, and rocking the cradle with her foot in which the two infants lay. Whilst the cuckoo was calling, the throstles and blackbirds filling the bushes and tree-tops with melody — and the nightingale, at a little distance singing his fill.

So the gamekeeper found her. One sweet afternoon it was. The setting sun gleaming through the trees, throwing his slant beams upon her golden hair, and shedding a yellow beauty upon the thickets and bushes around her.

He paused, and looked upon her with his grave, serious eye, as he leaned upon his gun, — and watched her as she lifted her head from her work — and stooped over, and looked into the cradle as a little whine was heard to proceed from it. Then she kneeled down by the side and soothed the little complainer to sleep again, and then bending down kissed first one and then the other, and so, serene and peaceful, took up her sewing once more.

The serenity and peace that were upon that face at this period of her life it was, in itself, a delight to behold.

"That's right," said the honest gamekeeper to himself, — "that's just as I would have it. And yet, it's a marvel to me how she can do it. Come when I may, look after matters as jealously as I will — it's all the same — I never catch her tripping. — It's all as if they were twins — as she promised me. No one could guess which was her own child, only, if there is a preference, it's always for the t'other one."

"Thou *art* a good lass, Alice," he went on, coming up to her, and laying his hand upon her shoulder.

She started up and turned round, and the sudden glow of joy came into her face — as it always did when he returned home safe.

It was a perennial feeling — every day the same — the same gush of joy when he came home.

He who was indeed her best friend — loved, honoured, and obeyed, as the superior, the protector, the firm and wise adviser — the all on earth to her, and he *deserved it*.

A woman's love is an inexhaustible spring, gushing forth in the desert of life, and making the wilderness to flourish like a rose.

"Thou art a good lass," he had said, and his manly features and dark eye were beaming with satisfaction and approbation.

"I hardly thought," he went on, still keeping his large arm, covered with the rough shooter's jacket, over her slender and delicate shoulders. "I hardly thought, my good girl — though I knew all along thou wert no common one — that thou couldst stand by thy good intentions so bravely and truthfully as thou hast done."

They sat down upon the mossy bank together, he still fondly keeping his arm around her.

"Dost thou know, Alice, when thou brought'st that babe home, my heart misgave me fearfully?"

"I don't know why it should," she said, looking up into his eyes. "Could you not trust me with it?"

"If I could have trusted any woman, I could trust thee; but mother's love is so strong. The God above sent it for the best of purposes, — he made the mother's heart bolder than the brave man's — softer than the brooding dove's — more terrible than the lion in its fury. It was a good and wise purpose, for all his gifts are good; but man — man — he misdirects and mars the good gifts of the Almighty, and the stream which in its native bed brings refreshment and blessing to all — driven from its course, only mischiefs

and harms. I am no scholar, Alice, and I can't put into words all I feel; but I was afraid — and that's the long and short of it — that *because* thou hast such a true mother's feeling in thy breast, *therefore* it would be the more impossible for thee to do thy duty."

"But it has been made quite easy to me, you see, Godfrey; for I love this child as my own. I feel as if it had no mother of its own, and I am so sorry for it."

"That is well, for do you know, Alice, if I thought you unmindful of your duty, or if any hurt were to come to this child entrusted to our good faith, I think I should go wild — I think — I think — I could never forgive — not even thee, Alice."

"Don't talk so, pray don't talk so — you frighten me. I do my best; you know I do; but God only knows — suppose the child should fall sick and die."

And cloud passed over the strong face of the man of the woodlands — that brave, daring, high-spirited man.

"Sick! and die! — Don't let it — that's all — Babies never die but through want of care — what art thou talking of, Alice — As if thou wer't preparing me — it bodes no good to talk in that way — Don't *let* it die — Do you hear me" — and he withdrew his arm on her shoulder — "for mark my words — I never would and I never could forgive thee, if that child were to die."

Alice turned pale — she dreaded her husband's displeasure above all things — he was as the mighty thunderer to the fair and frail one — strong in his love — but annihilating in his anger.

She had seen him angry once or twice — not with

herself, and not without cause — for his anger had been excited by deeds of cruelty on the part of those under his orders — but it had been terrible — she shuddered whenever she thought of it.

The babes began to move and to cry.

She took them up — one in each arm — and brought them to her husband — “And which looks the best?” asked she, and smiled.

“Why that little urchin — I declare I hardly know one from the other — but this one seems to me the bonniest — and that’s not our’s, Alice —”

“No,” said Alice, and she turned a little pale, and her eye saddened; “I have done my duty — but that’s not our’s — poor baby, he was born the strongest of the two — but he is not the strongest now.”

“Never mind, lass — never vex thyself — get him along some how or other till he’s eighteen months old, and then we’ll see if we don’t make a man of him.”

“Ah!” sighed Alice, and a dark presentiment of evil, which had haunted her ever since she had undertaken her task, came over her — “Ah! eighteen months! — That’s a long time, to.”

And too true — when at the end of two years — for so long was the little William Aubrey allowed to remain with his foster mother — when at the end of two years Alice brought the boy to his parents, she returned to a desolate home — she had some time been a childless mother.

She never had any other children — and she lived on in the secluded forest a desolate woman.

She never altogether recovered the loss of her child. The event had happened when her husband

was far away in Scotland, where he had been detained nearly six months.

It had been impossible for Godfrey to rejoin his wife in this time of heavy trial. People in his condition are still more the slaves of circumstances than those above them — it is unnecessary to enter into the details of these. — Suffice it to say, that Alice was constrained to meet this great sorrow alone — and such was its effect upon her that from that time forth she became an altered woman.

She said little — but at times expressions of remorse would mingle with her grief. — It seemed as if she could not be comforted — In vain her friend Hesther endeavoured to console her for having given the little one a rival —

She was, however, better after Godfrey returned — And her face lightened up with a strange troubled joy, when laying his hand upon her head he said solemnly —

“We ought to thank God that it pleased him to take *that* one.”

“It is a hard saying, dear Alice,” he added kindly, bending towards her and striving to comfort her — “a hard saying for thee, poor, childless mother — but let us thank God nevertheless — thou did'st thy duty — He will remember thee in the day when he maketh up his jewels, and thou shalt have thy child again — doubt it not.”

But at that she cried bitterly. It was as if she could not be comforted.

“Mrs. Craven is here,” said the footman, as Wil-

liam at last returning home was wearily re-entering the house.

His first feeling was vexation.

He was not in a humour to see even her. — He was fond of his nurse. — Still she could not compensate for the immensity of the want which pressed upon him.

He felt ashamed of this unamiable feeling, and recovering himself, "Where is she?" asked he.

"Up in your study, Sir."

"Has she had anything to eat and drink?"

"A cup of tea in the housekeeper's room, Sir — Mrs. Anderson has taken good care of her."

"That is right."

"Mammy! —" as he opened the door — "I am glad to see you."

"Child! — Mr. William" — rising up, taking his hand, and looking upon him with *such* a look!

... "Such, as the mother ostrich fixes on her young,

When that intense affection wakens the breath of life."

"It's a long, long time, since I have been to see you, Mr. William."

"You don't come often, good Mammy — Sit down, my dear woman — why don't you come oftener?"

"I don't like to be troublesome," she said, "Your father's fine servants don't fancy me too much, as it is — and, perhaps, you would be tired of seeing your poor nurse's face if she came too often — eh? — Mr. William."

"Pooh! — Don't talk nonsense — You know

I'm always glad to see you — and how's Godfrey Craven?"

"Why, he's ailing."

"Ailing! What's the matter with him?"

"The old matter and worse — he's fast losing the use of his limbs."

"You don't say so — and what are you both to do?"

"Nay —"

She said no more, she looked wistfully at him.

"Nay! That's no answer — what do you purpose to do?"

The woman seemed hurt at the way in which he spoke, as if she expected something more than this.

At last she articulated, but as with some difficulty:

"You robbed him of his son."

"I! — Now Mammy — or Alice Craven."

"Don't call me Alice Craven," she said angrily —

"Call me Mammy."

"Well, Mammy — you are always casting that up to me, — as if" he added with bitterness, —

"it was my fault, that a helpless infant I was driven from the bosom of an unnatural mother, and cast upon the tender mercies of a stranger — You proved yourself a mother and more I am sure, than *a* mother or at least than *my* mother to me — And you know — or ought to know, I feel deeply grateful for your care — and all that I can do, all that it is reasonable for me to do —"

"Reasonable!" she muttered to herself.

"Yes, reasonable — you know I am always ready

to do — but, Alice, you sometimes vex me — you seem to assert a claim over me that is more than I can exactly acknowledge — you know I am a man of a peculiar nature — not a particularly amiable one, I am afraid — and the more things of this kind are pressed upon me, the more inclined I feel to resist them. Tell me what you want — ask what you wish, but do not remind me of the wrong done to your poor little child, when I was a baby — in which others, not I — were art and part.”

“Yes, yes, it was all my own fault — blame *me* for it — Say what you will.”

“I blame nobody. We were all in the common case — the case of most human beings — of all but the *very* strong willed — we are the mere sport of circumstances, over which we have no control, and which we are too blind to bend to our good, even if we could control them. But let us have done with retrospect. Tell me what you want me to do for Godfrey Craven.”

“What his son would have done for him — if he had had that son whom you — I mustn’t say that again, it seems — whom I — and other things robbed him of.”

“Well, what would that son, do you suppose, have done?”

“He would have maintained him.”

“But I have not money to maintain him — not as he ought to be maintained — not as I wish. You know the allowance my father gives me is not a large one.”

“Shame!” she said bitterly.

"He has his own notions upon the subject — and probably just ones. As I am to have only a younger son's portion, he thinks I ought to be accustomed to do without money — so he gives me an allowance proportioned to my expectations."

"Whilst the Captain . . ."

"Has one in proportion to *his* expectations."

"Shame! — shame!"

"Nay, Mammy, don't look so black — it's the way of the world."

"It's a very vile, bad, and unjust one — and so I will ever say."

"And so you ever have said — over and over again — and so let it now be said for the last time — for there is no remedy."

"And you! — so handsome, so good, and so clever!"

"And so is the Captain, as you call him, much handsomer, quite as clever, and a thousand times more good."

"I don't believe it — I don't believe it — everybody says how clever you are — but only to think of your being poor — I can hardly credit that."

"Yes, good mam — I really am poor — poor for my wants and position. These things are relative — I declare I do not believe there is an honest labourer's son in the kingdom who is so often pressed for money as I am."

Alice seemed actually to writhe with pain. Her eyes were fixed upon the ground. At last, composing herself with considerable difficulty, she said:

"And you look ill, Mr. William — but I don't

wonder you look ill — bad treatment makes us all look ill.”

“I am not badly treated, my good nurse, don’t talk in that way.”

“But I say you *are* — To set one brother so above another!”

“It’s the way of the world, dear Mammy — If you love me, say no more about it.”

“But why do you look so ill?”

“Do I look ill? — I was not aware that I was looking ill.”

“Ah! Mr. William, Mr. William! — something is amiss at your heart — I can see it — I can see it.”

— “To be sure,” she went on, “it is not for such as I to be trusted with the secrets of such as you — but if I knew what ailed you, I could — I could find something, perhaps, to comfort you,” she added, rising and putting her hand fondly upon his shoulders, and looking up beseechingly in his face.

But recollecting herself — for there was an almost imperceptible motion of the shoulders, as if to shake off the hand — she shrank back and resumed her seat.

His heart smote him as she did this — for the hardness of his pride — so he went and sat down by her, and took her hand.

“Mammy,” he said, “if I were to tell you what ailed me, could you keep it to yourself? You are not like other women — you *could* keep it sacredly to yourself.”

“Ah! child — ah! Mr. William! — do you think that they could drag out of me, by wild horses, what concerns you! — or burn it out of me with red hot

irons? Tell your poor Mammy what's the matter — for something is the matter — something *does* ail you."

"Nurse," he said, and his whole countenance flushed up into a crimson glow — "What if William Aubrey was in love?"

"Dear, dear child! is that all?" she said, much relieved, and her face becoming serene at once.

"Is that all? — Surely there can be no great harm in that — Surely you'll not love in vain, with your beautiful face — for beautiful it is, though, perhaps, not altogether so blooming and handsome as the Captain's — and surely, with that sweet, thoughtful smile — and that thinking brow, as one may say, of yours — you're out and out more interesting than the Captain — and everybody agrees he's a charming young man!"

First a pensive, melancholy smile of affection, and then a darkened, clouded brow answered this effusion, but William spoke not.

— "What's the matter, my dearest boy? — what's the matter, Mr. William? Why should *you* be crossed in love — all true lovers as I've heard and partly know, are apt to be despairing. It's a sure sign of the passion. Why, even Godfrey would be as down-cast as a drooping bird, strong man as he is, when he was in love with me! So keep a good heart, dear Mr. William, for faint heart never won fair lady. And she must be a strange woman to my mind," looking fondly upon him, "who could prove cruel to such as you."

"Dear nurse! your wisdom is of the woods. You speak as a child of nature such as you are. — You know not how these things are carried on in the great

world — in London here. Life is not as it was in those old ballads of which you are so fond. Grant she would love me — what am I? — what have I to offer! Let her prefer me to him in her heart — what matter? But she does not love me — she does *not* prefer me.”

And he dropped his face between his hands.

“Oh mother! — mother!” he went on in a low murmuring tone, yielding himself up for once to the weakness of complaint, tempted to it by the loving and sympathising character of his companion — “Oh mother, mother, it was little to me till now — that inequality of condition which you have so resented for me — but now it comes — hard — hard — I saw her first — I loved her before he had cast his eye upon her — I feel it is folly perhaps — but I feel that for me and not for him nature had bestowed that wonderful charm — that face and form — that spiritual beauty, far greater than all other beauty, yet enhanced by so much beauty — those eyes that smile — that voice! — We are different men — He and I — altogether different — not a thought, not a feeling in common. Twins I have heard, are either as one single point, so closely are they united — or as two opposite poles, exactly the reverse of each other — So it is with us.”

“He called me mother,” said Alice to herself — and her heart fluttered and beat as it always did, when that fond name was bestowed upon her. The conventional circumstances which separated them were so painful to a heart glowing with the strongest and warmest affections, all concentrated upon two objects — her husband and this child!

This child who had hung from his callow infancy at her breast, and whom she longed to embrace and caress as a son. — But she dared not. He was a great man's child, and she a poor gamekeeper's wife. There was that deep, deep gulph between them — inferior and superior — and William was one accustomed to keep what he considered his proper position, in all circumstances. Now and then, however, upon occasions of sudden emotion he, who had never known what it was to experience the tenderness of his own high-bred mother — would bestow the name upon one who had proved herself even more than mother to him.

And then how her heart leapt at the sound. Mammy was but a pet name carelessly and commonly bestowed — *Mother* came with a certain solemnity, as if the heart in its severer moments acknowledged the claim — the claim of a love passing that of a mother which she felt for him.

"He called me mother," — and her heart beat, and glowed, and yearned towards him at the word.

"Sir — Mr. William — dear young master!" she faltered out, "I never saw you so unhappy before. You mustn't be unhappy — it's not for you to be unhappy. Something must be done. *You must not* be unhappy. I think I know — though you think I don't — why that beautiful young lady and you can't have one another. It's the old thing — because of Mr. Aubrey's injustice and partiality — but, Sir — if the young lady loves you, things might be made more even. Mr. Aubrey's a stern and a harsh, but he's not a bad man. — The heart that can love anything as he loves the Captain can't be so shut up to others as

it may seem — So hear reason — *If* the young lady loves you with a true and faithful heart, sure and certain but we'll find a means to make you happy. It seems bold in me to say so much; but Mr. Aubrey's kind and condescending to me — for ... too and — and — well — he'd listen to me pleading for you. I know he would. — He feels I've a right to speak for you. He likes me for loving you. He's very rich, we all know . . . So if this young lady really loves you, as she must and ought — keep a good heart and trust to your poor mammy."

"Love me! Did I say she loved me? No, no, Alice — though I have that strange and passionate persuasion that we were made to be one, it is too late. — He has already come between us — he, who has the right to put himself forward, which I, who had nothing to offer, could not do. She is a peer's daughter, Alice — Edward is an engaging fellow — he has already entered the lists in public. If I were to attempt it now, it would be I who should assume the odious character of my brother's supplanter and rival — and, besides, what could I offer to the woman I loved? — A younger son's portion instead of a vast estate — a pretty proof of disinterested affection that would be. — The sacrifices to be all upon her side! and for one who — oh! if he had millions of worlds to offer, would have laid them all at her feet."

He rose from his seat in great agitation.

Alice looked after him with sad surprise as he paced up and down the room, striving to recover his composure. She had never seen him so moved before. He was usually so calm — so completely the

master of himself. So he had ever been, as the thoughtful boy — yet more as the well-collected man.

It was a strange passion this — something she had never seen before — so different from what she would have expected in him — from what she had observed in others.

He came and sat down by her again.

Having once opened his heart, it seemed as if he must go on. The flood-gates of feeling once unlocked, the stream of confidence flowed full and fast to this affectionate and humble friend.

“Strange, strange,” he said, sitting down by her. “I have a superstition about it — Such things cannot be sent — cannot come over us like a summer cloud, for nothing. Unprepared as I was — never dreaming of any such matter — that this one face among so many faces — fair, it is true — most fair Yet there were others as fair — fairer, perhaps That this one face — should have power to raise in me this unaccountable passion. Strange! strange! — What is the meaning of it all? — For surely I cannot believe but that such things *have* a meaning — that these mighty, mysterious forces of passion have an errand! The very excess” — he went on — “the very absurdity of my hopes and wishes seem to prove to me that in some way or other they shall be accomplished. Such things cannot be in vain — cannot — shall not! — I must — I will possess her! And yet, yet — fool — fool” — striking his forehead, and the bright flashing of his eye subsiding to the deepest melancholy — “there is no way — not the slightest shadow of a way and yet. Yes, Alice,” turning to her, with a look so wild it almost approached to madness,

"I feel that I cannot live to see her another's, and that other my brother! — I would rather she were dead! Ah, ah, there is the arrow's barb — there the venom of the wound — my brother! — my own brother! — So near, and yet so far — The same blood, the same breath, the same home, the same hearth! Ah! ah!" and he gnashed his teeth in bitterest agony, "ah! ah! — there it is! — there it is! and rather than *that!* — he must die, or I will die."

She laid hold of his arm; she was pale as death — her teeth were chattering.

"No, no — don't talk in that way. — Your brother! No brother of yours — always crossing your path. No, don't look upon it so — If that it is hurts you so, look upon him as he is — as he has always been — your rival — your worst enemy — anything but your brother."

The words produced a revulsion of feeling.

"Don't talk in that way, woman" — he said, turning upon her — "Don't talk so — you know or ought to know that he has been the kindest and most affectionate of brothers. — Would God I could love him as he has loved me!"

"Then why do you talk so wildly?"

"Because you cannot conceive — no one who has not felt it *can* conceive, that horrid jealousy in love — doubly horrid when it lives among such near relations! — Any other rivalry — any other torture but *that*. It is horrid — it is dreadful! — it is insupportable! Yes," and his pale countenance suddenly brightened — "it is insupportable, and I will not even try to bear it."

And then, to compose his agitation, there came

over him — not the holy and manly determination to conquer and to subdue himself, to break by one great and painful effort those shackles of the soul which love without hope when not resisted and vanquished, casts over us. No strong sense of duty to himself — to his brother — to the Great Author of his being who sent him into the world to strive, and to battle, and to conquer evil and himself — none of these faithful and high thoughts calmed *him*.

No, he deadened himself by that opiate of the great enemy — when hope is not — and a noble resignation of the object desired is not — by the opiate of despair.

By yielding to the full force of his despair.

One outlet to this earth's woes — and that easy enough to the man who neither values life nor fears death — is ever open — He thought of a certain cool, deep, dark water, somewhere upon his father's land — hung over and shaded with oak, and alders, and willows, — where, as boys, they two had been forbidden ever to go, for the water was esteemed fathomless — There it lay sleeping, dark, silent, and cool.

Here, as a man, he had often been, and startled the wild duck from her nest, in the reeds upon the side, — and there, under that huge oak tree, whose golden-leaved branches spread far over the stream, darkening that which was already dark, there he had once sat, his Shakespeare in his hand — half-opened, at the place where Ophelia sinks into the envious stream. There he had sat, looking into the still depths — musing upon that strange theme, — self-murder. In the calm philosophic balance of his own

feelings, marvelling at the state of mind — speculating upon the passion of despair — which could so rupture all the instinctive laws of nature.

He recollected the day well — and smiled bitterly at his own vain philosophy.

Now that deep pool — it was to that he looked.

There was rest — There, that heart, now writhing under the scorpion lash of the furies, should find peace.

Sleep! peace!

Eternal sleep and peace!

Ah! fool, fool! who will assure thee of that? Vain and presumptuous intellect — false and mistaken courage — daring to die! — not daring to suffer! Ignorant even of the mystery — the deep mystery of passion under which he is agonising — yet without fear or doubt rushing upon the altogether unknown.

“I will not even try to endure it!”

He had said it, and in that saying found comfort and calm.

And a certain dark composure was restored to the face, which had been working with an agony in him so unnatural.

But Alice gazed upon him with terror.

She was silent for some moments, sitting there, and looking at him with anxious affrighted eye.

“Will not try — will not try — what does that mean? — What does he mean by that?” she kept repeating to herself.

“I am but a poor humble woman, you know, Mr. William,” at last she ventured to say; “but not altogether untaught. — Where I was brought up they taught me something — not enough — not enough,”

she said, looking at him with much emotion. — “Ah, dear! not nearly enough. They never taught me either *how* to bear — but one thing the Doctor did teach me — that we must all try to bear whatever comes — whatever comes... He was a firm strong man himself, not like you, Mr. William... A strong built, firm, great, brave man, and noting ever upset *him*. He expected all of us to be as he was — but he never taught us *how* — only that — But it was enough, because he was firm we dared not but be firm. And so — and so — it shocks me, and it grieves me, Mr. William, Sir, to hear you say, you will not try. What will you do if you won't try? — What *are* we to do if we won't try to bear?”

“Oh! oh! never mind — never mind — you are no casuist, Alice, — how should you be? Never mind me.”

There was something in his look that she could not endure.

“But what do you mean?”

“Oh, pooh! nothing — and now, dear Alice, I have said enough, and a great deal too much; however, it has done me good, dear, kind woman. Nothing like you women for that,” assuming a careless air, as he rose and went to open the door. “Good bye, dear mam;” giving her a kiss, “and think no more of what I have said — forget it as soon as you can, there's a dear woman.” —

And so he got her out of the room.

But as she went down stairs she kept saying to herself, “If he had but said he would do it — he would never do it — so my husband always says — only get a man to talk about killing himself and he'll

never kill himself — but if this young lady should marry his brother — he's one to do it — he put me off so — I know he *will* do it — I know him — I know every pulse that beats in his proud heart — This brother! — and what right has that man to come and take, one by one, every blessing of this one's life away — canker — canker — eating out his brother's heart — *his* brother! — very like him!

“But he shan't have that young lady — He shan't have everything and leave my William nothing. No, he shan't. There is one here who loves him, if nobody else on earth does, and he shan't have his noble soul rived out of his body for any of them.”

Alice had not been reared in the family of the strong, brave man, as she called the Doctor, for nothing. She had imbibed much of his determination, gentle and quiet as her usual demeanour was; and she proved it, when the occasion arose.

CHAPTER VIII.

Artists hold yon shapes but shadows,
 Hovering round thy mounting way,
 Tempting from thy track forechosen
 On through other paths to stray;
 Burns thy young aim, upward climbing,
 High above a guiding star,
 Onward — onward earnest-hearted;
 Lo, but wildering lights they are.

W. C. BENNETT.

— “MARY, dearest Mary, what are you about at this moment, charming Miss Prue. Inditing an endless letter to that paragon of lovers, Walter the penniless? Silly girl, what *have* you been about? I declare you fancy yourself twice as wise as I am; that may be, but you are not half so *knowing*, for learn, Mary of my heart, that since I have been introduced into this great mass of confusion they call ‘society,’ I have been taught to distinguish between two things very accurately.

“Do you remember that playing at synonymes, which Miss Fisher used to be so fond of? Really that woman was not one of the ordinary sort. She was wise and knowing too, or I am mistaken; and as the man parted the oyster, giving each of the suppliants a shell, I think she did very much so by you and me — to you she gave the wisdom, and to me the knowing — but this, *par parenthèse*. Put your good head to work at these said synonymes again, and distinguish between wise and knowing.

“One thing is certain — wise people may grow in

the country — but knowing, they can only become in town — and wisdom brings with it all sorts of good but totally useless things as regards the world we live in — namely, disinterestedness, contempt of riches, value for numerous qualities which count for nothing — such as goodness, modesty, strong principle, tenderness of heart, and universal charity — and all this valueless baggage you find heaped together upon Walter the penniless — and so — so — dear, wise, and most unknowing creature, you have chosen *him*.

“And there you sit content to wait for no one knows what or when — but happy, in that your dear excellent heart is satisfied — when, had you but been *knowing*, you would at least have tried a season in town first — when what would have happened do you think, I think? Why, then, I think you would have found it still more than I have found it — stale, flat, and unprofitable — and would have gone down again to Simcoe place more devoted to Walter the penniless than ever. I am already tired of this life — Why, if I were to love it, did my father and mother keep me down at that place all this time, and put Miss Fisher about me? Why did they suffer her, and that life together, to call forth in me wants and wishes which this life of society cannot ever gratify — these parties, and balls, and dinners, and breakfasts, and rides in Rotten Row — what are they?

— “Shall I ever learn to like it? Perhaps as people do when they begin to take to wine, or smoking, or any other nasty thing which they at first find abominable — perhaps, like the rest, I shall not only get a sort of a liking for it in time, but it will become quite necessary to my existence.

"This is what my mother said — when I complained to her that I found town dull, and wanted to be home at Hurstmonceaux again.

"‘Dear child!’ she said, ‘that is just as I felt myself at first, and yet I was as much admired as you are in my day — but never mind, you will soon become used to it — and find it at last impossible to exist out of society.’

"Dear Mary, what a horrid thing *that* would be — worst of all.

"But why do I go prating on in this tedious manner, about the dullness of town? Oh! it’s no longer dull — it is become a charming place within these two days — so —

"Such are the changes of mortal things —

"Sometimes to better, sometimes to worse.

"But in this case, at least, for better — life which seemed just sinking into a doze is wide awake enough now.

"Mary, dear, you know — for I have not concealed that little truth from you, that I have been very much admired, and have produced quite a sensation, as they say, since I have risen upon this scene; and no young first appearance this season has equalled the splendour of mine. And you know, too, that I have had plenty of admirers, but not one true lover, like Walter the penniless: and that I admired some, rather, myself, but did not really care a straw for any one of them; and now

"My dear Mary, I think the human heart is the strangest, strangest thing — and the real human story, I verily believe, if it could but be read in all its truth, which it never, never is — would exceed in interest —

exceed in strangeness — in bizarrerie — in contradictions — in every unaccountableness in short, — all that has been imagined, written, or sung, in the wildest or the most extravagant romances.

“A trite remark, enough, as I perceive, now I have put it down — but things come just haphazard when I write to you...

“‘When will this girl have done prosing, and come to facts,’ I think I hear you say.

“Well, it was at Mrs. Wilton’s assembly — I had dined there with papa and mamma. — It was not a very dull dinner — many military and naval men were there, which I think always makes it pleasant — they mostly seem more simple and earnest than other people — the old ones, at least — those who have dealt with real death and danger in the great war. — The younger are, perhaps, not much better than the rest of us — mere idle triflers upon the earth’s surface, with as little meaning in their life as in one of Mr. Devigne’s extempore fantasias on the piano-forte — remember you them?

“I sat by an old Admiral, as good luck would have it; and he, finding I was fond of the sea — for dear Algernon’s sake — talked to me a good deal, and seemed to like the interest I took in what he said.

“Dear Algernon! — Ah! Mary — Why? — why?

“He has come home more charming than ever — such an elegant, fashionable, dare-devil. ‘Oh fie!’ says Miss Fisher — ‘Lady Emma, pray do not let me hear you use such expressions.’ But it is just him; he would dare everything. They say he is brave as a panther — one’s tired of Lion — in action; and I be-

lieve there is nothing he will *not dare*, either by land or sea.

"Now, it's vain to scold me — I do — I cannot help loving that sort of character; its very faults are interesting to me — that careless way of trifling with danger of all sorts — of *all* sorts, even, Mary — mind that — it is to me so interesting — Courage! — Manly courage! — The courage to do wrong even — I am afraid the quality is so all in all to me.

"Ah Emma!" says my sweet Mary, and sighs.

"Pity, though, fair saint, that your own taste did not run a little more that way. You might have done anything with Algernon — but now, poor fellow!

"Well, let that pass — I will not tease you — we cannot help ourselves in these things. We are puppets that are played upon by mysterious powers — Why you, of all people, must prefer Walter the penniless, when you could have had Algernon, passes my comprehension and ever will — but forgive me, I am his sister.

"Where was I? oh, at dinner — We will skip the rest of it and get up stairs, where I am sitting upon a little settee — causeuse, I forget the foolish name of it — driving down my yawns, and endeavouring to look civil, whilst Miss Marston is detailing the interesting circumstances of her sister's wedding — wreaths and bonnets and veils and breakfast, and all — when the gentlemen — that is some of the older and nicer ones, begin to come up from dinner, and as the best luck in the world would have it, a knot of these dear old prozers fell into talk just behind me.

"You must know, if you read the newspapers, the brilliant action that has, not very long ago, taken

place in Indian Seas. Nobody talked of anything else for a few days, but everything passes away in the ever-flowing stream of events here, — and I suppose, this would have died into silence like the rest of them, had it not chanced that the hero of the tale — a young, remarkably handsome man — and heir to a large fortune, came up to London when all the world was in town; and then the clubs, and the parties, and the everythings, could think and talk of nothing else. —

“I cared little about it, till, as luck would have it, these dear old cronies of naval men, began to discourse of it just within hearing of me on my settee.

“Mamma says whatever one is, on no account to be rude — and Miss Fisher used to say the same thing in a somewhat different fashion — but in spite of good instruction, rude was I as a bear.

“I fairly said hush to Miss Marston, turned my back *sans façon* upon her, and had eyes and ears only for these dear old men.

“One of them was telling the story so well! Newspapers never relate a thing just as it occurred. — He was setting the matter right, and had to begin from the beginning.

“It was a seaman’s tale, full of sea phrases I did not understand much of it, but I gathered, that, in the first place, never was cleverer seamanship shown — that, in the second place, never was more heroic courage displayed — and in the third place, never more generous humanity.

“There was an episode about a dog!

“It brought the tears into the good old admirals’ eyes — You will not wonder they were in foolish mine.

“I twinkled them away as well as I could, but I

was obliged at last fairly to steal the corner of my handkerchief to those traitorous little orbs, or I should have had the tears running down my cheeks.

"Pearly drops, in a London party!

"What propriety of place!

"I am not going to repeat the story of the dog — I should tell it so ill that I should spoil it.

"Sometime when we are over the fire, and your honour is in the humour, I will try for it — but not now.

"A pause.

"For we are coming to the critical moment of my life's history, I verily believe.

"You know, Mary, how we both hate and despise girl's talk about love and lovers — but I bore with you when you were in earnest, and you must bear with me.

"Love that is pretended, and fancied, and all that — oh! what rubbishy, despicable stuff it is.

"But real love!

"Such as you bear to Walter!

"Such as I know now. Oh! it is stronger than death, and mightier than the grave.

"There is something terrible in its very sweetness — something that makes the heart shudder and tremble, even in the midst of its ineffable joy.

"Some young men came into the room.

"Among them was Algernon — and who with him?

"Edward Aubrey!

"It seems to me as if it was almost happiness enough to write down the lovely name.

"He was the young naval Captain that had done so well; and he was the close friend of my own, dear Algernon.

"Algernon soon brought him up to me.

"'And sweet sister,' he said, with his darling smiling look as if he was so proud of me.

"Ah, in that moment I *did* rejoice that I was beautiful — I did glory in my woman's prize — my beauty! when brought face to face with the glory of man.

"I felt my face all in a glow — not in an ugly flush, but all in a glow — and I had more courage than he had, for his beautiful animated eyes — they are blue, Mary — they fell before mine — as if — shall I say it? — as if mine dazzled him! — for — I really could not help it — I did look... well — pleased — I suppose I must call it.

"I sat down again upon this nice rounded settee; and Algernon came and stood opposite to me, chatting in his pleasant way. How I do love Algernon! And the young naval Captain stood by, a little retreating, so that I was obliged to turn round somewhat, not to leave him out of the conversation.

"I never saw such a sweet, charming expression as he has — So then, by and by, the rooms were cleared for dancing.

"And now comes the strangest part of my adventures. I don't know what you will say to me, Mary, now. You will understand me as little as I do myself.

"You know I am far from being short-sighted as almost every body in the world is. I can see and distinguish, in a wonderful manner, even in imperfect

lights. My Godmother, the Fairy, gave me the gift at my christening, I suppose.

"Well, the two young captains were talking to each other a little, and people, as I said, were clearing away in the other drawing-room, and as I turned to watch what was going on, I saw a gentleman upon the other side of the room, leaning against one of the windows, and looking my way — looking, in short, at me.

"There was no mistaking the expression of his eyes — I do not pretend to deny that — and distant as we were from each other I could not help seeing it.

"He was a small man, rather below the middle size, but very delicately, I might say elegantly made. His face was pale, and nobody would call him handsome — and yet there was a strange fascination about that face — when you had once looked, it seemed impossible to help looking again.

"I could not, at least. When I did look again, his eyes were cast upon the ground; but I thought I never saw a more interesting countenance. However, I did not observe long, for charming Edward Aubrey came colouring and stammering, — and his bright sweet eyes telling all manner of pleasant tales — to ask me to dance — and I, of course, joyfully accepted — and rose, and took his arm — and then, I turned back to look at that other; but he was gone, and I saw him no more that night.

"I danced with Edward Aubrey. — Such dancing! — How unlike any dancing I ever had before! — How we seemed to swim in happiness in the flow of that music which came sounding — sounding — and was the only reality to which I was sensible!

"But the evening came to an end at last, as all mortal things must do — and mortal felicity soonest of all — and Algernon and Edward Aubrey put mamma and me into the carriage.

"And then — how unlike a romance where everything seems to conspire to make poor creatures wretched! — here, everything seemed to combine to make me happy — for we were scarcely comfortably shut up and on our way home, when mamma began to talk about Captain Aubrey, and in such terms! — Saying he was the most delightful young man that she had ever seen — and rejoicing that he was a friend of Algernon's, whom she had ordered to introduce him at our house — and, in short, giving pretty broad hints that she thought him a most eligible young man.

"You know what that implies, Mary — in this abominable slave-market where we are put up for the chance of the highest bidder.

"I feared mamma might perhaps have expected something very grand from me — at least till the bloom of the first season was gone by — but no! — she seems quite content with Captain Aubrey — and I am sure I should be.

"But now, Mary, there is more to tell.

"The next day, in due course, Edward Aubrey called with Algernon, just at the time my horse was about to be brought to the door; so, instead of riding along the Edgware Road with trusty Elias to look after me, behold me with my two handsome cavaliers parading it up and down Rotten Row — and very pleasant it was. We talked and laughed and enjoyed ourselves; and I was thinking of nothing but the pre-

sent joke — when, lo! my eyes glancing at the walkers upon the other side of the rails, who should I see but the same gentleman I had descried the night before — he was walking our pace as we idly lounged along upon our horses, and I could not mistake the reason why.

“He was watching a foolish girl on horseback — with a cavalier upon each side of her — just in the same strange manner as the night before — but he was not aware, I am sure, that I saw him — yet I did, and my heart made a strange stop and pause — and I felt myself grow a little sick and pale, as I should do, I fancy, if I saw a spirit. There was again, that strange mysterious feeling of relation with this man — so disagreeable! — I hope he has not magnetised me!

“I turned again to Edward Aubrey, and talked with him to get rid of the impression — but somehow my gaiety was gone, and I was obliged to force myself to laugh, and seem at ease.

“We came out of the park by Stanhope Gate. The two cavaliers a little in front of me, I following them, and when just as I was going to pass through the gate, came a carriage with runaway horses, starting so unexpectedly upon me that I quite lost my head, and should have been infallibly struck down and trampled under foot, had not a strong hand seized my bridle, and pushed back my horse so suddenly, that he almost fell. The carriage passed like a whirlwind, just missing my preserver, who stood for a moment looking down; whilst I, dizzy with terror, could scarcely keep myself from fainting, and my

poor Jessy was shuddering and trembling in every nerve.

"As soon as I could recover myself a little, I bent down and thanked my preserver as well as I could; upon which he lifted up his face — for he stood there those few seconds immoveable as a statue — he lifted up his face — and what and whose should it be, but that of the very man I had seen before?

"His eye met mine.

"Oh Mary, what was there in those eyes of dark, deep grey? — What a look it was! — what intensity of passion! — of melancholy! — of subduing force!

"A shudder and trembling passed through me from head to foot. I felt the colour fly into my face, — I felt my eyes fall before his — I could only falter out something or other. I forget all that was said, but that look! that eye! I never to my dying day shall forget.

"You used to laugh at me and call me superstitious. Who could not grow superstitious who had lived the life I have lived? That wild, wild Hurstmonceaux! Those broad walks under the solemn oaks — those twilight rambles through the shady, trembling thickets, with the moon glistening on the sleeping lake — and the trees casting such deep, mysterious shadows — and the creeping, stilly, whispering sounds — and the nightingale's strange, passionate chants — do you remember? How we would go, half-shuddering and hesitating along — fearful even though we were two together — almost believing that we saw the mysterious genii, the spirits of the woods in those vistas between the trees — this even when we were two together! But when you were gone away, and I

used to stroll out of an evening by myself! I could quite persuade myself — nay, I am even now half persuaded — I did see strange realities — I did feel strange spiritual influences.

“You seemed not to like to hear me talk in this way. — Ah, my Mary, you had chosen a better part; but upon me these superstitions, which you in your wisdom denounce as baseless and dangerous, have taken a strong hold.

“People should not keep girls secluded in wild, remote, romantic places, if they mean them afterwards to be rational beings, instead of slaves to imagination. There is not a legend or a tale of whispering spirits — of haunting shadows — of second sight — of ghosts — of magnetism or of magic — which I do not feel more than half inclined to believe. When you and Miss Fisher have reasoned about these things, and disproved their existence by laws of logic, laws of nature, and so on — you know how you and she talk — something within me has ever given you the lie.

“Something within has seemed to say that all you assert is very fine, very plausible; but that there is more in this living, breathing world about us than your notions would admit. Spiritual influences within us and about us that are not in this matter-of-fact way to be accounted for. In short, to use one of those expressions, trite, because they are immortal —

“There is more in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than is dreamt of in your philosophy.”

“You may put it as you will — turn and twist it as you will — I say that the influence exercised by that deep, mysterious eye over my feelings is most strange and unaccountable.

"It is not love — not any such thing; and I do not think you will imagine that it is, as it seems to me, a more deep, mysterious agency. Not that I despise love — I look upon a true and sincere love as the most holy and sacred of things; but yet it seems to me trivial and common-place in comparison with this deeper interest.

"I thought I beheld at this moment the arbiter of my destiny — that I was under the influence of some irresistible power with which it would be vain to contend.

"As for him, he turned paler than ever. However, the other two came up, and Edward Aubrey introduced him.

"Introduced! — what a word! How strangely these every-day expressions and proceedings mix themselves up with higher and more spiritual imaginings. It is like the mingling of gold and clay in the great statue of the vision. Stay! — was it not iron? But never mind.

"Edward Aubrey introduced this man, so strangely interesting before — as who and what, do you think?

"His brother!

"His twin, and only brother!

"Now, sweet, incredulous Mary, wonder — do wonder. Is it not odd that this man, who, unknown, excited such unaccountable interest in me should prove to be neither more nor less than dear Edward Aubrey's *own twin brother*?

"Dear Edward Aubrey! Yes, it is out — what is the use of mincing the matter? — dear to me past words! And this man is his brother! — his twin brother!

“Edward wanted to lead my horse home, but this William — for that is his name — would not allow, saying, ‘Edward was little acquainted with the management of horses,’ which was true enough; so Edward yielded, as I am persuaded everybody will and must do to this man, and he led my horse home.

“Walking with his head bent down in a musing, meditative manner, silent as a ghost, which will not speak unless it is spoken to — and I was too dizzy, and felt too much shaken to wish to speak, so I was as silent as politeness would allow, and only uttered once or twice — and at such times he would lift up his face, and fix those deep, passionate eyes upon me for a moment, and then withdraw them again.

“And so at last we got home.

“Then I was Edward’s once more.

“Oh! it was so sweet, so strangely sweet, to escape from the mystical, unintelligible influences of the one, to the cheering, open daylight sunshine of the other.

“I am his — I know I am, for life and death — and he is mine.

“Twenty-four hours, scarcely, since we first met, and he knows, and I know, that we are bound together for this life, and for ever.

“No, I cannot conceive that eternity itself can, in its ever moving circles, disclose a time when Edward Aubrey and his Emma will not be one.

“It is as if I had loved him ever since time began, and so should do till time was no more.

“You will understand this part of my story, if the other and more romantic portion is unintelligible to you. Your love for Walter, I think I have heard

you say, seems to be of the infinite — without beginning or end. If you never said it, I am sure you must have felt it.

“I was interested by William, I don’t deny it; and he seemed to throw a strange influence of charm over me. But when sick, and faint, and scarcely able to stand, I laid hold of Edward Aubrey’s arm, and he pressed it — Oh! so fondly and gently to his heart — there came such a lightsome, wholesome, loving feeling over me, I felt better directly — supported, and cheered, and comforted — and so, so happy!

“Forgive me, best and dearest of Marys, for these volumes. You say you love to have them — and I love to send them. I love to open my whole heart to you. And now, sweet girl! send me some of your dear, useless, rational lectures, back in return.

“But don’t scold me for giving away my heart in such a hurry to Edward Aubrey — for, indeed, I am quite sure that I have his in return — and, besides, till you have seen him, you cannot form a guess how irresistibly charming he is.”

CHAPTER IX.

The pride of human pomp and power —
Say lives it in this awful hour?
When false and failing, blank and drear,
The fairest dreams of earth appear,
And hope scarce triumphs over fear?

MRS. ACTON TINDAL.

"YOUR brother is a delightful fellow, William, that every one must acknowledge; and he is just come ashore, after several years spent at sea. — He is young, spirited, and selfconfident; loves pleasure, and has earned a right to enjoy it. — I am as sensible of all this as you can be; and I hope I am prepared for little things, that may not be altogether what I would — or you would most wish in him . . . But these absences — night after night — nights which I cannot find, at least, after a certain hour, are given to general society — to balls or parties, and such things, which it is natural enough, and where I wish him to be — these late hours unaccounted for, make me seriously uneasy —"

"I am no puritan," Mr. Aubrey went on; "I wish young men to see and know the world, and I am not, I hope — become a crabbed, selfish old man — envious of pleasures he can no longer share — but Edward's manner of spending his time vexes and disappoints me — I looked for something different — something . . ."

"Well — well young men will be young men. —"

But what of this Lord Algernon Mordaunt, with whom he seems so intimate. People shake their heads, and look mysterious when I mention his name. Is he or is he not a young scamp of fashion, with whom Edward had better have little to do? — or is he merely a young man of the world, going on in the way of other young men of the world — at whom the grey-beards shake their heads ominously — though little harm comes of it after all.

“Tell me, William, what you know about this young man — and whether you are acquainted with the cause of the close intimacy subsisting between him and Edward?”

“I do not recollect that his name was much mentioned in Edward’s letters,” he added, after pausing a little to give William the opportunity to speak; but no answer came.

The young man sat, thrown sideways upon his chair, listening to what his tall and stately father was saying, but with his face turned a little away, so as to conceal the expression of it.

At last Mr. Aubrey, after having thus spoken, pausing frequently in his discourse, as if expecting an answer, but in vain — fairly stopped with,

“What do you think of it? Speak out, William.”

William then turned round, and presented his pale features, and troubled countenance, to his father.

Any other father might have observed the expression of suffering written on the face of the son before him; but Mr. Aubrey did not. His anxieties were all absorbed by the absent Edward. He was only intent upon drawing information from William upon a subject so close to his heart — he was accustomed to

look upon this second son, merely as he stood in relation to the other.

William felt this indifference at the moment more acutely than usual. He had long known how little he was to his father — nothing scarcely in comparison with his brother, but now, that he was really suffering — ill — and looking, as he knew, very ill — to see plainly that his father either saw not — or cared not, for one or the other, wounded him painfully.

“Speak out, William,” he had said, and had fixed those stern intelligent eyes upon his son’s face. But he read nothing that was there. His thoughts were in another place.

“Edward,” William at last began, “is just as you say, Sir. After some years spent, cabined up in a small vessel, he is enjoying the pleasures of liberty and society at home. It is natural — why should he not?”

“That is an evasive answer, William. I apply to you. I have confidence in your judgment and observation. Tell me frankly what you have observed in your brother...”

“I am no spy, Sir,” said William.

“Don’t use such odious terms to me,” cried his father, with some irritation. “Who talks of spies? — I want nothing, which as a father — and a father justly anxious about his son — I have not a right to require — from a man in whose opinions I place confidence. Tell me the truth at once, Sir, and let me have no evasions — I hate them — What do you know of Lord Algernon? — What do you know of the way in which your brother spends his time?”

“As usual,” thought William bitterly; “when he

can make use of me, and especially in any matter that regards my brother's interests, I rise in value — I become ever an object to be won by civil speeches — when that is no longer the case, I drop into my accustomed insignificance."

"I am not my brother's keeper."

"So said Cain," remarked Mr. Aubrey. "Will you give me no satisfaction?"

"If I could give you satisfaction I would . . . and yet stay," making a violent effort — forcing himself, in spite of his jealous heart, to enter upon a subject that was killing him; "perhaps I *can* give you satisfaction upon one point at least — Edward's increased intimacy with Lord Algernon — it arises, I believe, from attachment to his sister."

"How! the Lady Emma!" with a start of joy — and an expression of undisguised astonishment and pleasure, rarely to be seen upon his face.

"You do not say so — the Lady Emma! and pray how do her friends receive it?"

William's lips became white, as he answered:

"I believe with every encouragement that can be given in such a case."

"That is agreeable intelligence, indeed!" said the father, recovering his usual composure, but looking excessively gratified — "that is agreeable intelligence — nothing could give me greater satisfaction — a beautiful girl of high family! Whether there be money, I know not — and most certainly I care not. I shall do everything on my side to forward so desirable a connexion — and you must help me, William."

William felt sick and faint, and his face grew

paler than ever, as he said, in a scarcely articulate voice:

"I do not exactly see what *I* can do."

"Nor I neither, just at this moment; but circumstances are for ever arising which enable us to forward or to obstruct the progress of such an affair. — You are in Edward's confidence, no doubt. Encourage him by every means in your power to persevere in the pursuit of this most desirable object. Tell him, if he care to know — and he has not the usual perverseness of youth, he *will* care to know — tell him that nothing on earth could give me greater satisfaction than to see him ally himself thus."

"And must it be my own brother," was again William Aubrey's bitter thought — "Must I be, not only an alien from my father's heart, but must I be driven from Edward's, or rather he from mine. Can I bear in feverish agony to witness his joy, his bliss triumphant — to gaze in jealous hatred at a happiness I ought to love and share — to see her another's — and his! Oh! any one's — any one's but his."

"What is the matter with you, young man?" — said his father, interrupting the deep reverie into which William was falling, — "What is the matter with you, young man?"

He started, as if suddenly roused from the deepest slumber.

"Matter with me? — Nothing."

"Then you show a strange indifference to what should, one would have thought, next to myself, have been of the greatest interest to you — your brother — your twin brother's happiness. But it is not the first time," added Mr. Aubrey, in a tone of severity, "not

the first time that I have remarked this selfish and egotistical insensibility to the welfare of my elder son."

"I was not aware of it."

"Then *be* aware of it — an eldest son, as the prop and roof-tree of the parental house — I look upon — as he ought to be looked upon — as he is regarded by all the rational part of world — as the object of most value and importance in the eyes of every member of that house. *His* good conduct and success reflect a lustre upon — as his failure and misconduct cast a shadow over, the whole of his family — upon his alliances the progress and advancement of that tree depends, of which the other members of the household are but as the lateral, and in comparison, insignificant branches. — But this is not the first time, William, that I have observed a certain coldness and indifference upon your part, with regard to this subject so all-important to me — I hope, Sir, I am not to attribute it to any baseless and fantastic whims entertained by certain theorists, who, in my opinion, have vastly too much influence in these times."

William Aubrey was silent.

"Answer me," said his father sternly, "you know, that I look upon silence at a moment like this to be but a form of revolt."

"I am a younger son, myself, Sir —"

"What do you mean by that? — A younger son! — I hope, I am not to hear any of the envious cant, too often now-a-days put into young men's heads, about equality of rights — parental justice, and so on. I would have you to know, Sir," raising his

voice, "that I admit no rights in my family but such as are founded upon my will — no claim of justice in the disposal of a fortune acquired by my own talents and abilities, but such as I choose to admit — Sir, the wisdom of the world has decided this question ages before either of us were born to discuss it, and if it had not been so — had I been the first to recognise the rights of primogeniture, I should have done so — and have expected you, Sir, to acquiesce in my decision."

William Aubrey only answered by a slight inclination of the head.

Mr. Aubrey was a taciturn man, of cold, reserved manners, but when once excited to a certain degree, he would sometimes burst forth into the most passionate expressions.

Upon the present subject he was peculiarly irritable. His determination to make an eldest son, as it is called, of Edward, is so common a one, that it is not probable that his conscience upon that account would have troubled him. But he felt, and he knew, that it was not merely as his eldest son, that he showed this preference to Edward — but that in making him heir of his fortunes, he had likewise made him heir of his affections — had indulged an unjust partiality as well as followed a common rule — that he had not been — would not be — could not be, — just to his other son — that he thought little of his interests, and was indifferent to his happiness, and when he read in William's eye what he chose to consider unjustifiable resentment, at his following those laws of primogeniture common to the world around him, but which he knew and felt, if he would have

owned it, had a far deeper source — his irritation was excessive. He was a man of strong will, accustomed during the early part of his life, to bear down the puerile opposition of men of other climes and other natures, by the exercise of despotic authority — and in this way he had endeavoured to beat down the sturdy sense of wrong which at times was to be read in William Aubrey's eye.

On other occasions things would go on better between them — William was cool and reserved, and his father stern but civil. A certain respect for abilities and strength of character which each acknowledged in the other, might influence them imperceptibly to themselves, and at such times they got along tolerably well — as two men do who are obliged to respect, but cannot love each other.

There were moments, however, when the sense of his father's unkindness and injustice struck with more than usual force upon the feelings of William Aubrey, and at such moments, the father observing the symptoms of internal rebellion, which he was resolved never to acknowledge as just, would be excited to the utmost irritation and anger.

So it came to pass now.

"Don't bend the head in mock submission to me, Sir," he cried.

"There is no mockery intended," William answered sarcastically. "It signifies that which is true — not acquiescence of reason — but submission to power."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh!" rising; as if about to leave the room; "you

are too acute, Sir, not to comprehend so simple a distinction."

"Stay! — Let us have it out this once. Once more, for the five hundredth time, I think it is, I read proud defiance and dark censure in that eye of yours — What do you complain of?"

"Simply that it has pleased Heaven to make a younger son of me. You would not have me such a mere insensible ass as to rejoice in such a lot — or such a hypocritical coward as to pretend that I did."

"I would have you like wiser and better men if I could — not envious and jealous of the advantages possessed by others."

"So I would have myself."

"And why are you not what you would have yourself? Why are you not what you ought to make yourself?"

"Because the same unknown, irresistible, mysterious power, which makes one man a being of stern, unconquerable will — and sent the warm stream of happiness, self-confidence, and courage, dancing through the veins of another — made me thoughtful — still and deep — a weigher of facts — no dupe of words — no slave of pretences — one who cannot and who will not accept names for things. As for envy and jealousy — they are the natural growth of one heart — just as indifference to justice may be the growth of another — just as an unreflecting enjoyment of the fruits of injustice may be the portion of a third."

There was a pause of a few moments.

Then Mr. Aubrey, recovering his ordinary composure of manner, said —

“William Aubrey — you are a match for me.” —
He mused a few moments more — and then, with unusual cordiality of tone he added —

“Go forth, my son — struggle with the world and subdue it as I have done — and after you have subdued it — use your power despotically — without owning responsibility to any — as I have hitherto done and intend henceforward to do.”

And, saying this, he rose and left the room.

After the momentary irritation had subsided, he did not seem in the least degree agitated by this conversation. To measure his proceedings by the standard of right and justice was foreign to every habit of his mind. He had a sort of intuitive eagle glance, which took in at once a wide circle of things — but when once his mind was settled upon any point — it was a vain attempt to turn him. His conduct, with regard to his two sons, had become the habit of his mind — he thought no more of it than, by those among whom so much of his life had been spent — it is esteemed unjust that this man shall be born a Brahmin and that a Pariah.

When the repose of his conscience was disturbed by the behaviour of his plain-spoken younger son, he would be aroused for the moment to violence — but the passion subsided as rapidly as it arose, and he returned to his usual course of action, devoting the whole energy of his character to the advancement of the interests of his future representative — leaving the other son to get along just as he could and would.

His father had left the room, and William remained sitting where he left him.

Now the man who remains — the man who keeps the field after such an encounter, is the man who is worsted. It is the mark of victory to walk away — this power to resist the almost frenzied temptation to continue the war of words, — being, indeed, proof of a certain triumph of that self-command which is as the rampart to the Great City of Life. It is true the father, by one imperious sentence, had commanded William to remain where he was — and listen to what it pleased him to say — but the young man was not prepared, after his own last bitter reply, to find the contest so suddenly brought to an end. — His father's self-command astonished him — he respected it and he was humbled by it — he felt worsted.

This feeling only increased his irritation — only deepened the shadows that were darkening over his soul — closing every beaming prospect — as one sees the black thunder-clouds gradually gathering round the horizon until all is wrapt in gloom.

That one bright spot — that one — the eye which had fallen under his! the faltering voice, that one moment of mysterious emotion which had told him, in spite of all, that something in him there was which possessed a strange magnetic power over Lady Emma — something almost persuading him that a love deep as his, must, nay had, forced an answering sentiment — the vague superstitious hope which had been as the one bright spot in his cloudy heavens — that too had vanished.

He knew his father well. He was a man of power and determination, sufficient to carry every point upon

which he had set his mind — and common sense pointed out at once that in the present case, everything was so reasonable, — so exactly in accordance with what must be the natural desire of all parties concerned, that there really was not the shadow of a difficulty to be removed.

Edward had but to speak, and his father had but to declare his intentions in his favour — to render him an acceptable suitor in almost any family, however noble. Far more in one like this, at once very noble and very needy.

It was the morning of the day upon which the ball was to be given at the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux's, that the scene above related took place — each of the brothers had received a card.

William had anticipated this evening with a strange mixture of pleasure and pain. To see her again — see her, in her triumphant loveliness — look once more upon that sweet, gay, animated face — even this was rapture. Moreover he had resolved to dance with her. He was little of a dancer, but what mattered that? He would take one turn with her — just sufficient to secure her as a partner; then he would have her hand within his arm, and he should lead her down those steps upon which the ball-room windows opened, and through the groves of that park-like garden, and down by the sleeping water, and while the nightingales were singing, and the pale, round moon calmly shining, — he would speak and try his power.

Try what she was, and what he was.

He had in his way a determination as courageous, as resolute, as iron, — as Mr. Aubrey himself.

But now as he sat there, his resolution began to waver. — Should he, in defiance of his father's declared wishes, — of what must be the wish of her parents, — of what must be her own best interest, and his brother's best interest, — should he endeavour to thrust himself into this circle of joy, an ominous intruder — and substitute, if in his power, confusion, and distraction of opinion and feeling — hesitation and doubt, and jealousy, in place of all this straightforward affection and happiness.

Hope had forsaken him. The glaring absurdity — the ridicule of setting up such pretensions as his, in opposition to those of his brother, struck him now as the act of an idiot, rather than of a rational being. And if it were vain, as it was odious, openly to contend for the field, why not give place at once?

Why — as all the laws of honour, both in love and arms, forbade — maintain a contest which was utterly hopeless, and which could result only in an amount more or less of gratuitous pain to all parties?

Why not retire as a man of spirit ought to do — as a man with his heart in the right place would have done?

CHAPTER X.

"Deliver me from the fallacies of the world, from my own folly, that I be not cheated by the one, nor betrayed by myself."

JEREMY TAYLOR.

It was a night such as William's poetic fancy had painted it.

The moon had risen, bright, round and clear; yet the stars might be seen through the air — soft glittering spangles upon the blue spreading sky!

The evening was warm as that of Italy, when two lovers sat and gazed at those patterns of rich gold upon the floor of heaven — Not a breath was stirring — The splendid villa, or rather palace in the Regent's Park, stood surrounded by tufted groves and shrubberies, its long front one galaxy of lights. — From the saloon, which was the dancing room — a vast lofty apartment one blaze within — those broad steps descended, which reached along the entire centre of the front, stretching out into long wings on either side. These steps were adorned with innumerable flowers, visible as if it were day, such were the floods of light which illuminated the whole of the large pavilion which this centre in some sort represented — The sound of music heard from the saloon filled the air, and festive groups, masked or unmasked, as the case might be, in all the grotesque variety of a masked and fancy ball, were crowding in and out of the wide-opened windows, ascending and descending the

steps — or winding among the bowery walks of the gardens, which were glittering with coloured lamps on every side.

The Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux, who rarely gave parties, piqued herself, when she attempted such a thing, upon giving the best of the season.

Lady Emma was loveliness itself. In a wreath of lilies of the valley mingled with delicate little wood-flowers so light and faintly tinted, just like the flowers which everyone who loves the woods, knows and loves. She wore a dress of mingled paly green and white, her beautiful hair flowing around her in a way which could not have been allowed at any but a fancy ball. Her eyes were bright with innocent enjoyment, as, with the light steps of the wood nymph she represented, she glanced from place to place more like a vision than a reality. By her side, as her shadow, the young naval officer might be seen, unmasked, and his dress uniform of white and blue (for uniforms were admitted as fancy dresses), showed off his figure to the highest advantage.

He knew nothing of love's artifices, not he. He adored her, and he showed it, without disguise. In some, this might have appeared obtrusive and ill-bred, — not so in him. It was all so spontaneous, so simple, so unaffected — such a matter of course. The world seemed to agree to accept it so, and to look upon them as engaged lovers, though not a word of that nature had he yet ventured to say.

Those, who knew him little, were struck with the ease, and, to use an old, almost obsolete word, the gallantry of his manner. There was that in it of observance, of respect, of devotion, which young men of

the world have agreed to discard, but which, when united with a manly freedom and spirit, will always produce its effect upon women. His blue eye too was so bright, his smile so sweet, the expression of his countenance so charming! Yet had any friend who really loved him been present, one who cared to observe the slight but expressive changes which time insensibly produces upon the countenance, he might have felt grieved and anxious at the indications to be discerned there.

That clear, ingenuous eye was no longer the same. Bright it was — and fervent it was — but there was no longer that perfect, lucid, confiding frankness for which it had once been remarkable. Clouds came and went over that once open and cheerful brow; and the countenance was from time to time obscured by a certain troubled darkness. For a moment the pensive, anxious, uneasy expression would be there, — then he would shake it off, — and would chat and laugh with his usual animation — with more, perhaps. But the laugh seemed less sweet, — less gay, — less natural, — and the pleasant stream of unaffected conversation had lost its easy flow.

It was when he was gazing upon Lady Emma that this change of expression was the most visible. Yet it was evidently not the melancholy anxiety of a doubting lover. There seemed to be something behind.

And, alas! most true — there was something behind.

Edward was no longer the same. He had suffered himself to be betrayed by the ruling fault of his nature — facility — into courses which were as offen-

sive to his taste as contrary to his principles — if principles, indeed, he could be said to have. His should rather be called good instincts than good principles, for his nature was most happy — but his moral education, properly so styled, had yet to begin.

His childhood had been entirely neglected.

Those great ideas of responsibility to a higher power — of watchfulness, self-denial, and self-distrust, which enable the man to pass with an undeviating rectitude through the labyrinth of life, had never been inculcated. And perhaps, under these circumstances, the very possession of those naturally good dispositions with which Edward was gifted, became injurious — it served to disguise to him the extent of his moral wants.

Natures high and magnanimous, as the one before us, are apt to be too facile in matters they consider of indifference. They are often exceedingly easy and good-natured, as it is called, — and Edward was particularly so — besides the tempter was the brother of the girl he adored; and passion acting upon a heart like his, shed more than the usual delusive charm over everything that was in any manner associated with its object.

Edward loved Lord Algernon for Emma's sake, and suffered this unprincipled young man to lead him from one step to another, until he found himself involved in engagements which his conscience and judgment disapproved — and which, though as yet no particular mischief had arisen, he felt would awaken — were they known — so much just anxiety upon the part of his father and brother.

But night after night was thus passed away until

at length the fatal fascinations of play began to involve him. What he had originally done, merely in complaisance to Lord Algernon's wishes, was now continued to gratify his own. He was very clever — of a highly ardent and enterprising temper, and, like too many young men in his position in life, he had at present no earthly thing to do. He wanted an interest — a pursuit — something to stimulate his spirit. He found it, alas! where so many others, once good and innocent as he, have found it.

To play whist, exerting all the skill which the game demands — to bet high! — and tremble at the danger of losing sums, which he knew his father would be justly displeased at his having risked — and which, rich as he was, it might inconvenience him, if lost, to pay . . . the very excitement of the danger possessed an invincible charm — whilst to extricate himself from the perils he incurred, by the exercise of his own exceeding skill, was a delight irresistible.

Every morning brought its compunctious visitings for this conduct, and with them resolutions not to offend again — those vain, half resolutions with which, and not with honest good intentions, hell, as it has been said, is paved. Such half resolutions do not even reach the point of honest intention — far less do they result in real action — they serve merely to satisfy the gnawings of that sort of conscience which depends very much upon the state of the nerves, and may be laid asleep by a hearty meal or a gallop in the fresh air.

Still, though thus, in a manner, silenced and stupefied, the good monitor was never altogether to be laid

at rest; and there was a sense of internal dissatisfaction with himself, ever present. Oh, how unlike to the happy consciousness of useful and honourable endeavour, with which he had walked the deck of his vessel, gladdening every eye that beheld him!

Had he been soundly educated — his moral nature developed as it ought to have been — had Edward Aubrey been taught to look upwards — the true model been placed before his eyes — had he, in short, been a Christian man, instead of a mere member of a Christian society — these evils could never have arisen — the temptation would have been resisted at first, had the habit of early resistance been acquired. But he wanted the faithful compass, the unerring guide. He was there — a beautiful vessel, exposed to all the waves and winds — the shifting lights and fallacious signals of a world, in which, with the best compass, and the best pilotage, it is so hard to steer aright.

The internal dissatisfaction that was growing upon him was more peculiarly felt this evening.

Surrounded as he was with all, to his fine perceptions, so peculiarly delightful — and allowed, nay more, encouraged, to devote his time and attention to the sweet object of his admiration — at this moment more than ever sweet and charming — this dissatisfaction, this discontent with himself, became peculiarly galling and oppressive.

How happy but three weeks ago — how perfectly, how supremely happy would all this have made him! — but was he happy now?

He did not even ask himself the question. He was quite unaccustomed to this sort of self-inquisition. He

suffered the undying worm to keep gnawing there within, without calling himself to account — these uneasy feelings to haunt him without troubling himself to ask why. But she was not so easily to be satisfied.

She had, once or twice, when looking up at him, perceived the cloud darkening over the countenance, once so frank and gay, the bright expression exchanged for one of suffering and care, and she was struck and affected by it. Her woman's instinct told her that it was not upon her account. There was a change, but she was not the cause of it; and she felt privileged, as they walked up and down the room, her arm pressed closely to his breast, to ask the cause.

Lady Emma was of a frank, open temper. She had been brought up in the retirement of the country, and she knew little of mere conventional reserves.

She perceived that Edward was not exactly as he had been; and she saw no harm in asking what had happened.

With that arm of hers pressed so closely to his heart, she felt she had the right to take the interest she did in his happiness.

"I have been looking at you several times, Captain Aubrey," she began, "and I have been thinking what a changeful countenance yours is. At times it is gaiety itself, and you seem the happiest of beings; then, suddenly the sky darkens over . . . You are like an April day."

The blood rose suddenly to his temples, then as suddenly retreated.

The arm was pressed more tightly to his heart, as he answered:

"And are you so exceedingly, exceedingly kind as to observe my change of looks? — and can you care — may I dare hope it — for my clouds or sunshine? Oh! it rests with one, and with one only, to make mine a perpetual sunshine."

No man should ever call a woman *kind*. It always sounds to her sensitiveness like a tacit reproach.

Lady Emma blushed in her turn, and loosened her arm a little; then she bashfully raised her eyes, and stole a glance at her lover's face. What she read there made her no longer ashamed of being *kind*.

There was a silence for a short time, then he said:

"I have had cause to be dissatisfied with myself."

He paused a little, and thus went on:

"When a man has only himself to answer to, he cares little — perhaps too little — whether he is pleased with himself or not. But it shall be so no more with me."

"I can hardly believe it possible," she said with great simplicity, "that you should ever have cause to quarrel with yourself."

"Who has not? — and I most of all," was his answer, and then he looked down again at her with oh! such intense tenderness! — and he felt the little arm trembling in his.

He took the hand which lay upon his arm, and he pressed it gently, and he was about then and there, surrounded as they were, to declare his passion, and ask for that heart which he believed to be already his own . . . but at that critical moment — ah! that mysterious thread of moments upon which life hangs! — Emma's governess came up and interrupted them.

She said, that the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux was calling for her daughter, to be introduced to, and dance with, the Prince of C. C., she believed it was — and so, with considerable hurry and fuss, she carried her away.

Our Marchioness was a shrewd woman, and had she been aware how matters stood, nothing could have made her more angry than this blundering interruption of a conversation which was becoming so interesting. Princes might dance with her daughter, and it was well that they should — it gave the young creature a certain *éclat* which was valuable. But the Lady of Hurstmonceaux was not one to drop the substance and grasp at the shadow. She knew that Captain Aubrey was an excellent match and a sure card — that it was one of those affairs which may be called a real good thing; equally eligible on both sides — one of those schemes which may almost inevitably be brought to bear — Yet, secure as she felt, she would have been not the less glad to see all things comfortably settled, by a regular engagement, so that she might be able to lay the subject aside, and turn her mind undisturbed to other pressing matters, which troubled her much, and with good reason.

But worthy Miss Fisher, who unfortunately, had, by Emma's desire, been invited this evening, was not quick-sighted in love matters, and not being in the Marchioness's confidence, she blundered as we have seen.

Captain Aubrey very unwillingly relinquished Lady Emma's arm, suffering Miss Fisher to lead her away; and as it was for the purpose of being introduced to

the principal personage present, he did not choose to follow her; so he turned away vexed, and, if truth must be told, excessively jealous — and he went and sat down in a corner of the room, by the side of one of the large windows looking towards the garden, from whence he could watch the whirling waltz going on within, or gaze upon the calm and beautiful night, and the various groups wandering about the grounds without.

The scene was fantastical and grotesque — masks always give a peculiar appearance of oddness and unreality to people upon such occasions — he was in no very good humour, and he sat looking at the people as they went in and out, and making somewhat sarcastic reflections as they passed to and fro. At last his attention was arrested by a figure, dressed as a German broom girl, her face entirely covered by a mask, which she kept most pertinaciously on.

The figure was standing upon the steps, and seemed absorbed in thought, taking no notice of the crowds as they ascended and descended, sometimes even jostling her, but when thus driven from her position, she resumed it immediately.

She seemed to be quite unaccompanied, and to belong to no party. Every now and then, however, she raised her eyes, and, as he fancied, fixed them upon himself, keeping her face turned towards the place where he sat. He was just about to move away, and put an end to this kind of disagreeable scrutiny, when, his eyes following the direction of hers, he became aware of two figures approaching.

The lovely Lady Emma was re-entering the dancing room, leaning upon the arm of a young man

much taller than herself, so as to bear the just and beautiful proportion to her fine and slender figure. He was dressed in the splendid Hungarian costume, and literally blazing with jewels. He held his mask in his hand, and a face was thus displayed which appeared the very ideal of manly beauty, enhanced by the grace and elegance of the most splendid figure in the world. He was, in short, a proper peer for the lovely girl who hung upon his arm, and it would seem as if everyone acknowledged this — the crowd falling back in a sort of admiring gaze, as these two fine creatures came forward to take their places in the dance.

They began to dance, and it was, indeed, a very beautiful sight.

The dress and figure of the cavalier so magnificent, and the light, glancing, and fairy-like creature who floated away as if her feet scarcely touched the earth, so lovely —

She thought and cared little for all this, but her eyes were bright and her countenance beaming — she was sure that Edward loved her, and that this very grand young man was perfectly charmed with her — and true enough he did feel a little in danger of parting with his heart, which, like an ordinary piece of coin, had gone into circulation and come back to him so often. He was not accustomed to disguise his admiration when excited, and he made no secret of it now.

The waltz seemed to Edward Aubrey as if it never would come to an end.

He sat there, like one stupified by some sudden and unexpected shock, gazing vacantly at this magni-

ficent apparition which had arisen, as it were, suddenly, between him and the object of his passion, casting him down at once from the happy elevation to which the general esteem and admiration of the world had elevated him — sinking him to a mere nothing before the young and handsome magnate.

Edward Aubrey felt, at that moment, very much as men in mythic times must have felt, when the divinities in person descended from Olympus, to enter the lists with poor creatures of clay, and bear away the prizes in love and war.

These high-blooded, high-born, highly accomplished beings, who belong to the ancient, unadulterated aristocracies of ages, may not, perhaps, be ill compared with those divinities of the antique world, in whom the men of those times — it may be from some vague tradition of superior races — believed.

To the worshippers of ideal beauty — to those who, like some of us even at this time of day, regard personal beauty as something sacred, and inestimable, and in itself to be revered, not as the ornament of, but as the essential good (of these I profess myself not to be one) — a being like this is transcendental.

Captain Aubrey, however, did not feel himself in the least inclined to worship beauty in the form of the Prince, however much he might in that of Lady Emma.

Black, bitter jealousy was at this moment turning all the sweetness of his nature into gall, as he kept his eyes fixed, riveted upon the pair.

That dance! — that odious dance! — would it never come to an end?

Oh yes, it would end — it is already ended —

and they are arm in arm again — and they are coming his way.

The puppy! — The proud conceited puppy! — The rascal foreigner! — Woman! — woman! — woman! — Flirt! — jilt! — trifler! — His brain was reeling — his heart raging as they passed him. The young Hungarian bending down his proud, beautiful head, and speaking in tones so soft and low — and she, with her cheek faintly flushed by the exercise — a tinted lily — her eyes bent on the ground, hanging on his arm listening — and so softly smiling!

Oh, that ineffably sweet smile!

And she never once looked up — though she passed close by him — neither hearing nor caring. — Was he forgotten already?

They passed, and he rose and came towards the steps where the woman, dressed as the "Buy-a-Broom," was still standing. —

"Do you know me?" she began with the usual freedom of the mask.

"Not in the least," he said, and was about to pass her.

"But I know you," she answered, just moving so as to prevent him from going on, without unduly pushing against her.

"I know you — and I am sure you know me."

"I assure you I do not in the least — and if you know me, it is because I am without a mask, so that any one who chooses to take the trouble to enquire, may learn my name; but I never, to my recollection, heard your voice before."

"Very possibly.... Then, on honour, you do *not* know me? Will you give me your honour upon it?"

"If it is any satisfaction to you — yes."

"Because I have something to say to you."

"Say on."

"Something which concerns your good — for I have read your heart — yes — I know more of you than you suppose — and now I warn you — turn your eyes away in time. — Look before you! Ask yourself — can you pretend to rival such a man! You are a handsome, pleasant young fellow enough — nobody denies that — you know and do your duty — you are brave, loving, and true; but what's all that? *He* is a Prince, beautiful and deceitful, bred in courts, flattering, and false, but fascinating, and a foreigner! — And you will set up your claims and pretensions against his, will you?"

"You need not stop me to tell all this — I have been feeling it, without your help, this last half hour," he answered bitterly, surprised out of his self-command for the moment.

"You have! — I thought so! — Then listen to me. — Edward Aubrey, you are too good to be the sport of a vain, heartless girl — but if you are not careful, you will be.... Young man, when you have learned to know the sex as I have, you will find that there are faults — nay, there are vices — which are charms in their eyes. — Only look yourself — and see whether in this one less than half an hour, you do not know that she has changed to you — you, Edward Aubrey — you, honest and sincere as you are — aye, honest enough, and sincere enough — but what woman ever loved a man for *that*?"

Edward's blood was already boiling — the venom

thus administered seemed to drive him almost mad — he was beside himself with rage and jealousy.

He looked the way the mask bade him — and, sure enough, he thought, who could mistake the expression of that face!

“Nay,” the tempter in female form went on — “If you are not satisfied — go and be satisfied — try her — go and speak to her — See how she will seem to like it — See what welcome you will have — Why? can you suppose that, brought up by such a mother, she does not know very well what she is about? — and can you imagine that mother will ever rest now, till she brings this matter to bear? Princess C. C.! It will sound a little better, I imagine, than Lady Emma Aubrey.”

“Come, Algernon! Are you not tired to death of all this fiddling, piping, and masquerading? Let us go and amuse ourselves like men.”

Lord Algernon had his own reasons for changing his tactics, and was now as desirous to get Edward Aubrey away as he had of late been to bring him and his sister together. He acquiesced readily.

“My good fellow, I have been sick of all this nonsense an hour and a half ago — so let us get our hats, and steal a march — we shall never be missed.”

“Never be missed,” Edward repeated bitterly to himself.

“And if mamma should find us out,” Algernon went on, “Why she’ll suppose we are only gone to

change our dresses and get masks, which I'll swear, if interrogated, was the truth. But hold! Really it might be capital fun to do that. I have ten thousand minds."

"No — no," — said Edward, putting his arm into Lord Algernon's, and pulling him along.

"I tell you I'm sick of it all. Let us go to the Club and have our revenge."

"As you will," answered the other.

And for the first time Edward was the seducer to the fatal board.

CHAPTER XI.

"Enough.

To pluck commiseration of his state

From brassy bosoms, and rough hearts of flint,

From stubborn Turks and Tartars never train'd

To offices of tender mercy."

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

THEY were gone.

The festivities continued.

The bands played with increased animation; the night, as it deepened, seemed to increase in beauty; a soft wind played among the leaves and flowers, and the nightingales were revelling in song.

The stars were shining large and bright in the heavens, the tiny lamps glittering like thousands of glow-worms below.

That young enthusiastic creature, so alive to the beauty which surrounded her, was anything but what the mask had described her to be — anything but a worldly schemer and calculator — for she was the mere child of imagination and passion, and resembled any creature on earth rather than her mother.

We left her, the young, beautiful, imaginative, and inexperienced girl, descending the steps which led to the gardens, hanging upon the Prince of C. C.'s arm.

Flattered she was — perhaps for the moment a little touched, as women are but too apt to be, by the devotion of any one whose devotion is esteemed an honour — but it was the mere excitement of the moment — and there was the faithful woman's feeling

at the bottom of it — for, even as she went down those steps, her colour heightened, and her eyes sparkling, she looked round for Edward.

She looked round to see whether he was there to observe her triumph, and gloried in thus enhancing the value of a heart which was all his own, by giving proof of the disinterestedness of its affection.

How many women every day, from poor Camilla Tyrrel on board the yacht, to the victim of yesterday, have made the same mistake, and lost the heart they so highly prized, by the indulgence of this somewhat sentimental vain glory.

But he was not there — at least, not in the place where she had left him. She was a little disappointed not to see him, but not in the least alarmed. Little did she guess all that had been passing in his heart, or the manner in which he would soon be passing his time.

Throwing desperately at hazard —

He had abandoned his favourite whist table, and there he stood, with pale cheek and haggard eye, watching the turn of the dice, and betting madly — not with the gambler's passionate hope, and fierce hunger of gain — but with the vain endeavour to distract his mind, and annihilate one passion by another.

It was the first time in his life that he had experienced the racking torments of jealousy — of disappointed love — and all the rage and despair which belong to that form of anguish, and little knew he how such fierce agonies of the heart are alone to be met and subdued.

Had it been bodily pain, danger, imprisonment,

suffering under any mere physical form, he would have endured it with fortitude and calmness — but against his present feelings he was helpless as a child — weak as the feeblest of cowards — reckless and desperate as the most untutored savage.

So there he stood, his temples aching as if they would burst, his eyes wild and staring, urging on the frantic game with the fury of a maniac.

Lord Algernon marvelled at the change — half rejoicing, half regretting that the work seemed so effectually done, and that the man whom he had been accustomed to regard as a model — whose conduct had ever been a tacit censure upon his own — was now being swept away, and a victim to the dire passion of gaming, and with an apparent defiance of consequences which astonished him.

He stood observing him some time in silence. And now, fortune seemed to rejoice in her new votary, and to welcome him with her highest favour — heaps of gold began to accumulate to an enormous extent before Edward. Then Algernon seemed suddenly to be seized with the same frenzy — he began to bet upon the throws of his friend with an equally desperate disregard of calculation — and soon heap upon heap, and notes to a very large amount began to accumulate before him also.

Long this desperate game went on. Thirsty and fevered, they kept calling for wine, and drinking eagerly; then they threw again — and still as they threw the most extraordinary run of luck attended them. At last almost mad with excitement, Algernon proposed to stake all their winnings upon one final chance. The challenge was accepted, but the sum in

question was so large, that a sort of partnership was entered into among the standersby, who divided the risk among them.

One well-experienced calculator, however, took the largest portion of the bet. — Reasoning upon the doctrine of chances, which answers so well upon paper — he assured himself, as far as assurance is possible in such cases, that the probabilities of a high throw must be greatly against one who had met with such unparalleled success during a whole evening — it was almost impossible, according to all the rules of calculation, but that the tide of fortune must turn.

The two young men, who were, themselves, also now playing in partnership, declared, that they had no wish to leave the table, winners to so large an amount — but that it was to be understood that the present was their last throw for that night; winners or losers, they should then leave the table.

The cool and experienced calculator stood there, with thoughtful, unmoved face, watching the eager impassioned looks of the young men around — the greedy eyes of Algernon, who was well-known to him, fixed upon the heaps of gold and notes lying before him on the table, and the wild, excited air of the young naval officer, a comparative stranger. Wary and composed, he kept repeating to himself — “The tide must turn.”

True, perhaps, but not for that night.

Edward handed the box to Algernon.

“Throw, you,” he said.

But the gentleman above mentioned interfered —

“I withdraw my bet, if the hands that throw are changed.”

"Are you mad?" whispered Algernon, "with such a run of luck in your favour — to pass the box to me."

"Be it as you will," answered Edward carelessly. He raised his hand as he spoke.

The dice fell upon the table.

He has won! —

The eyes of Lord Algernon flashed with a fierce, hungry joy — Edward turned silently away.

He cared not to calculate his gains. As the cry arose that he had won — it was as if a sharp poniard had entered into his heart. He had sought at that table distraction, not gain, and now as the flood of fortune poured in upon him, with it came the miserable thought — "It is worse than valueless — it is no longer for her."

To have lost — to have been plunged into all the misery of money embarrassments, of his father's anger, and his brother's quiet disapprobation — to quarrel with them, with the world, with everything, and fly for shelter to his ship — that was what he was panting for. The voice of the winds and waters was sounding in his ears — a refuge from his intolerable misery.

He had firmly believed when he risked this last throw, that he should lose — and he had won! — He knew not what — cared not what — he had won to an immense amount.

He turned away, and his eye fell upon one of the large mirrors against the wall, reaching from ceiling to floor, and there he saw reflected, not only his own fevered excited face, but the haggard countenance of a

very young man, who stood there the picture of dismay, and as if thunderstruck at his own losses.

He was a mere boy. — A slender, delicate, raw, feeble-looking youth, whose hair, pale and scanty, stood almost on end; and whose features, simple to childishness, were distorted with agony. The agony of a feeble spirit, wherein all that supports the man is swept at once away. His hands were clasped convulsively before him, his cheek was ashy pale, his eyes staring, his white lips quivering.

Weakness of character is a contemptible and ridiculous thing, but when the weak are driven to hopeless despair, the excess of their agony almost renders it sublime.

This poor, raw lad was one just sent from a private select establishment, to a fashionable college at one of our Universities. The school was one to which the father, at once a rigid dissenter and a very proud and vain man, who had made his own large fortune, had consigned his son, with the idea of escaping the dangers of a public school, and from thence he had launched him at once into the vortex of university life. The poor sensitive youth found it difficult to stand his ground, untrained as he had been to assert himself, and hold his own against the violence or the ridicule of the many, and he soon from mere fear — the fear of not being thought manly — launched into courses, considered desperate even by those who held law and order at equal defiance.

Among other of his silly ambitions, it had been one of the first to become a member of this present fashionable gambling club, — he had succeeded, and this was only the second night of his appearance upon

these boards. Seeing other young men, whom he admired and emulated, joining in this chance against the man with the run of luck, — he had vauntingly put down his name for a much higher portion of the risk than he was the least able to meet, and he had lost! — and more by thousands than there was the slightest probability of his finding any means whatsoever to pay.

His father!

He trembled even to think of his father — that stern, despotic father, to whose severity he was probably indebted for the moral weakness and cowardice that had been his ruin. What would become of him? What should he do?

Put a pistol to his head?...

But at that idea his cheeks grew more blanched than ever, and his teeth rattled within his jaws.

Such was the picture of despair which greeted Edward, as he turned from the gaming table.

And at that sight, a feeling of horror came over him. For the first time in his life he knew what it was to hate and abhor himself.

He, in his restless defiance of what was wrong, in his frenzied impatience to escape a present misery, had been the cause of hurling a fellow creature down the fearful abyss into which it was plain this poor, pale, helpless, half-idiot had fallen.

But Edward's heart was good, in spite of his many faults, and the weakness which others, more hardened, might have laughed at, aroused in him a feeling of sincere, almost tender pity, and he could not refrain from going up to the poor chap-fallen simpleton, whom, but five minutes before, he recollected as so vain and

boasting. The lad had fallen a few paces back from the crowd round the table, where every body was talking loud, and amid a confused hubbub of voices, Lord Algernon was quietly arranging in bundles and rouleaux the Bank notes and sovereigns before him.

"You seem very uncomfortable" — Edward began, speaking as a man might do to a mere boy — "I wish you could point out any way in which I might be able to serve you."

Two great school-boy tears ran down the miserable lad's cheeks, then a flush of burning shame followed; then a feeling of anger at being thus addressed by the man who had won his money; then a fear of being thought raw and a child.

He did not lift up his eyes, as one more practised might have done, and scowl down what he considered a very impertinent piece of compassion, but he turned sulkily away, shaking his head and muttering —

"I want nothing from *you*."

And so he left the room.

But his agonised, foolish face haunted Edward like a spectre — and when, at last, he was called upon to come to the table and receive his portion of the gains — sick and disgusted he looked with horror upon their amount — whilst Algernon, suddenly looking up from business, cried,

"There is one wanting — The second on the list — Mountford! — he's not paid."

There was a general exclamation of "Where the deuce is he?"

"I saw him but a moment ago," says one.

"Stolen away, stolen away! by Jove," cries another.

"That will never do. No, no, my young master. If you *will* keep company with men, you must learn, that scores must be paid and engagements kept."

And several young men hurried out of the room and down stairs.

They soon returned, two of them hauling in the poor trembling caitiff; he looked only half alive.

His only idea, when he left the room so hastily, had been that of scorning assistance, and acting, as he imagined, in a very high-spirited manly manner. He never dreamed of being suspected of the endeavour to run away from his responsibilities, little as he knew how to answer them; and now, when he heard the interpretation that was put upon his behaviour, he was ready to die with shame and mortification, though too bashful and nervous to find words to explain himself.

"Come, my young gentleman," said Lord Algernon, insolently, for he knew who poor Mountford was, and despised him, from the depth of his heart, as the son of a man who had made his fortune by the manufacture of cotton hose.

"Come, my gentleman — none of your tricks here. As I presume you would have pocketed the money if the dice had been in your favour — it won't do to shirk the business when the cast is against you — so fork out your notes, young son of a stocking — or else learn the noble art of I O U's."

"I O U but how am I to pay? What am I to do?" said the lad, looking round him in despair.

"Pay, you young ... rascal," he muttered between his teeth. "How came you to bet if you did not know how to *pay*? That may be Nottingham honour, young gentleman, but it's not what we call honour here."

"Algernon — Algernon" — said Edward, laying his hand upon his shoulder — "be quiet — let the poor lad speak. What was it you were going to say?" he added, turning to Mountford, with great kindness in his look and manner.

"I don't know — I have nothing to say — I have not the money — and my father would flay me alive rather than pay a gaming debt."

"Why you precious scoundrel! — and knowing this, you put down your name for this amount" — showing him the list upon the leaf of a pocket-book — "and meant to have sacked the winnings if you had gained!"

"I only did what I saw all the rest of you doing."

"All the rest of us! you fool, puppy — all the rest of us! You think that's the way gentlemen deal with each other!"

The poor young man grew paler and paler; he seemed as if he could hardly stand. There he was, twenty or thirty indignant, contemptuous, mocking, scornful eyes fixed upon him — with weak and tremulous nerves, shaking in every limb — his brain whirling in utter confusion — he neither knew what to do or to say.

Edward bent down his head, whispering Algernon, who was busy at the table as ever tradesman might be at his desk — counting, and receiving, and dividing, and calculating.

"Let the poor lad alone. Take his I O U. I will be answerable for the payment."

"Pooh! — nonsense, Edward! What are you thinking of? His father is a rich old churl, good for nothing but to be bled."

Edward only answered coldly, —
“I presume, if *I* give security for him, you will not refuse the lad's note-of-hand.”

“Not I — do as you like. It's all one to me. Only mind, Captain Aubrey, I am a poor devil myself, and *I* cannot afford to be generous.”

“I understand you. The loss falls upon me alone.”

“Why it will be half your winnings.”

“I only wish it were all.”

Upon which Lord Algernon lifted up his face, and fixed upon him a broad stare, between contempt and amazement, and seemed ready to burst into a loud laugh — but seeing something or other that he did not quite understand in Aubrey's face, he forebore to laugh — and saying carelessly, “Be it as you please,” went on with what he was about.

Edward passed to the opposite side of the table.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “by your permission, I will have a moment's conversation with Mr. Mountford.”

The young man upon this lifted up his scared eye — and then he could see how much friendship there was in the expression of Edward's face; a something which subdued his foolish pride and affectation of spirit, and the tears came into his eyes, and began to trickle down his cheek again as Edward put his arm within his, and led him to the other side of the room. Some of the other young men at this whistled in a low tone — some put their tongues into their cheeks — some turned with indifference away. There was not one — not one among them all — these young but practised gamblers, that had a thought of pity for the wretchedness of one companion, or sympathy for the generous humanity of the other.

"Young man," Edward gently began, when they were out of hearing of the rest — "you must excuse the liberty I take — I mean well by you, and I hope you will at once look upon my interference as it is intended. I guess, by the few words you have let fall, that your father is not a man to be coaxed into paying debts of honour for one who has no right to incur them — but I see you are sensible of the deep disgrace of having played in the hope of gaining a large sum, upon the credit of an engagement which, if you lost, you were unable to discharge. This was bad, Sir — very bad."

"I know it — I know it! — I did not think of it! — I assure you upon my faith and honour — I never saw it in this light before — besides, I was sure I should win."

"Sure you should win!" Edward could not help repeating in a slightly contemptuous tone.

"Why did not Mr. Briscoe feel sure of it — or why did he risk his money? — and everybody says he knows."

"Well — well — you have lost — and of course you must pay."

"But I can't! — I can't!" cried the poor wretch in a deplorable tone. "I have not five hundred pounds in the world."

"Then you are disgraced."

"Oh! oh! oh!"

"Will you promise me faithfully if I rescue you from disgrace, that you will touch neither card nor dice for the next two years — nor make a single bet during that whole time — and that you will immediately withdraw your name from this Club."

"Withdraw my name from the Club!"

"Yes, certainly. — You know the alternative is to be turned out."

"How! — I don't understand."

"Why, you ... *ninny* ... — but attend. Can't you see, that if you do not pay your debts of honour — of course you will be driven out from the company of *honourable* gentlemen."

"I am sure I don't think them so particularly honourable. Why they none of 'em pay their tradesmen's bills."

"That is not the question at issue just now. — Perhaps I have my own opinions upon that head as you have yours — but of this I am certain, that they are not fit company for one like you."

"Like me, Sir!" drawing up.

Captain Aubrey took no notice of this, but went on —

"And therefore it is upon condition that you withdraw your name from the Club, and give me a written promise to the effect I mentioned — that I will endorse your note-of-hand for the sum in question — and, furthermore" — lowering his voice, "I will accept the said note as part of my share of these hateful gains — and if you will accompany me into the dining-room, which I think is empty, you shall see me put the document into the candle."

A flush of joy and surprise crimsoned the pale cheek; — and the figure so beaten down and degraded by contemptible cowardice and despair, looked for the moment almost dignified by a genuine good feeling — that of heartfelt gratitude.

Mountford seized hold of Edward's hand —

"You will! Then God bless you for it."

They went to a little table, and the affair was soon settled. And then the note-of-hand endorsed by Edward was taken to the gaming-table. He simply showed it to Algernon, saying, "carry this to my account;" and then, in a friendly manner, turning to Mountford, said —

"Come along with me, I have something to tell you." They both went down into the dining-room, where candles were burning, but where no one was present.

The note-of-hand was soon in flames within the chimney, and its atoms dispersed to the elements.

And then, without going up stairs again to receive the portion of the spoil which yet remained for him, Edward turned homewards.

It was by this time between five and six o'clock; and the sun was blazing far above the horizon over the still sleeping world of London.

CHAPTER XII.

"Friendship is constant in all other things,
Save in the office and affairs of love."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

... "AND so, sweet Mary, as I told you, it was a beautiful ball; a ball — like a thing in a fairy tale — or what one fancies one sees in some ballet at the opera.

"You never beheld anything more beautiful than the long line of the house, one blaze of light, as it was reflected in the water upon the lawn; and the trees glittering with what seemed numberless little glimmering stars; and the real stars over head, upon that bright night, shining down upon us.... Oh, so glorious! seeming to say, how far their brilliancy exceeded all that insignificant man could do.

"You remember the chorus of Haydn's you are so fond of, 'The heavens are telling.' 'One thinks in every star an angel speaks.' Dear Mary, were not these strange thoughts in the midst of a masked ball — but that is the use of opening windows and letting the crowd flow out of doors; there is something in the vault of heaven so far surpassing the loftiest and most noble ceiling that ever was painted.

I was excessively happy the first part of the evening; and just in the way you would have me be happy. A way in which I felt as if it was right and good to be happy.

"There is that in Captain Aubrey that makes me feel as if I were the better for liking him as I do; and the better for feeling that he likes me. So different from some foolish, tempting, wrong and deceitful feelings I used to have, at merely being admired. There is a pleasure in being admired — *that*, I call pleasure; there is happiness in being liked — *that*, I call happiness. Do you remember you used to talk in this way long ago? — I did not quite understand you then — but I do perfectly now.

"I don't know what Captain Aubrey and I talked about at first — all sorts of trifling things — but then he has such a way of talking! He always seems to me to feel so rightly about everything — but yet I thought he did not seem happy — there was a depression about him that I could not account for. He did not seem so happy as he used to be. I was so sorry to see it. His nature is in itself so joyous! Every now and then this cloud seemed to come over him, just as we were enjoying ourselves the most. So at last I ventured to ask him whether anything was the matter? — and I found something *was* the matter.

"Ah, Mary — matter indeed!

"But I did not know then what it was, alas! as I do now. I was in a fool's paradise.

"Mary! Mary! Is that the only paradise in the world. Is one never — does no one ever meet with any but a fool's paradise here? A paradise of mere shows and deceptions. Is there no *real* happiness to be found? — I begin to think so.

"But I was happy, then — oh! so happy!

"I could not mistake the tone of his voice, the look of his eyes, as he said these words — 'Oh, it

rests with one, and only one, to make mine a perpetual sunshine.'

"They must mean something, surely — all I wished them to mean — but ah, Mary!

"Just as he was going to say something more — and I was trembling so, I did not know what to do — between hope and fear of what would come next, just at that turning point, perhaps, of my whole existence — who should come up but that good but, on this occasion, stupid Fisher? Breaking in upon the conversation — at that critical moment — telling me, in a fuss, my mother wanted me to come and to dance with Prince C— C—. At this Captain Aubrey first seemed as if he would not let me go — but I felt ashamed when Miss Fisher, in a hurry, kept saying my mother was waiting for me, so I gave a little pull, as if I wanted to be released; upon which he dropped my arm instantly, and I went away with Miss Fisher, and met my mother bringing up Prince C. C., and saying something about 'where had I hidden myself?'

"And who is Prince C. C.?"

"He is a very handsome, very accomplished, very rich, very fine young Prince; a real Prince! Not a little German potentate of five hundred quarterings and fifty acres, but a real Prince from the eastern part of Europe. Of a right royal line, and the most agreeable and finished gentleman one ever saw.

"Mary, it was impossible not to be gratified at the sudden look of admiration — don't think me foolish — it is a part of my story — life is a chain of little things, I think — all working steadily, as it were, in some one direction... this sudden look it was that gave me courage and gave me pleasure.

"Pleasure! I will not deny it — I was proud at *that* moment — oh, how proud! — and I thought — this *is* something — this stamps a value upon the offering I have to make to Edward.

"And I was charmed with the Prince for giving me this delightful feeling, and I was still more pleased, the more I saw of him. There was something so *high* about him — something quite different from any man I ever met before — it made me feel as I fancy the young ladies did in the old world, when those beautiful divinities, Apollo and so forth, came down among them.

"We waltzed together, and he danced charmingly. It was quite inspiring to dance with him. I had the feeling that we looked so well — and fool! that I was — all the time I was pleasing myself with imagining that Edward was looking on, and seeing how I looked, and seeing that this Prince of princes admired me, and that he was valuing my affection all the more, because of what I could inspire in others.

"Not that I mean — that the Prince had fallen in love with me. I had no such nonsense in my head — but I was so glad that Edward should see that such a one admired me.

"Oh! Mary, Mary, how my head and heart do ache this morning. — After the dance, we went down together to the pleasure grounds, where were tents and refreshments. I had, glancing that way some little time before, seen Edward standing by the window above the flight of steps, talking to a mask in a German 'buy-a-broom' dress, and I felt so pleased to pass him, and intended to give him as I passed a little as-

suring look, as much as to say, 'I don't care for all this in the least' — but he was gone.

"I looked east — I looked west. — Captain Aubrey was no longer to be seen, and from that moment I took no more pleasure in anything. The Prince and I walked round the garden together, which was illuminated till it was as bright as day, and he kept talking for some time very agreeably, as I thought — but what cared I?

"It was of no use — my spirits were damped, and everything seemed flat and tasteless; and, as when one is in that humour one is sure to be very tasteless one's self, so it was plain the Prince found me, for he asked whether I would return to the house, as he believed he was engaged to a young lady for the next quadrille. I said my head ached, and, if he pleased, I would sit down in the fresh air a little, and begged that I might not detain him, or that I should insist upon returning to the house; upon which, after making a few polite difficulties, he did as he was bid, and oh! was I not glad to be left alone to breathe!"

"I felt so glad at last to be quiet — to think upon what had passed — upon Edward's way — and speech, and to try and comfort myself for his not being where I expected to find him, by the security of what had passed — the certainty that he cared for me — and so I began to feel sure that he was not gone away, though I could not see him anywhere.

"But as I sat there, now looking at the stars, now searching among the gay masquerading groups

in the garden, in the hopes of finding him — suddenly the 'Buy-a-Broom' passed behind the seat upon which I was.

"She stopped when she saw me, and seemed to hesitate a little as she stood looking at me. These masks, people seem to think, entitle them to be as rude as they please. She stared at me, as no one without a mask would have dared to have done.

"At last she said —

"'Buy a broom, lady?'

"'No, thank you.'

"'Buy something else, then, lady?'

"'Thank you — I do not want to buy anything.'

"'Not even truth — if it were to be sold?' said she.

"'Truth is not sold,' I answered. 'Falsehoods sometimes are.'

"She looked very fixedly at me again for a few seconds; then she said —

"'Very true — shall I give it you, then?'

"'I do not think you have any truth to give that can concern me,' I said.

"'Oh! but I may have, though you do not think it. An indifferent stranger may tell you truths which a partial, blinded friend would, may be, never see. Lady, those who dazzle all eyes cannot be seen as they really are, and those whom others always regard under deceptive lights, are never likely to behold themselves in a just one. You are a good young creature in the main — I can see that; and a more beautiful one I never beheld. But you are like the rest of your foolish sex — the slave of appearances.'

"I turned half away. I thought this impertinent, yet I could not help longing to hear more. I was

sure by the voice that it was a woman and not a man that was speaking; so I did not get up and go away.

“‘There are two,’ went on the mask. ‘One! — Where is he at this moment? Risking his honour and robbing others — little able to bear to be robbed — at the gaming table, whilst you are sitting here — *alone*. There is another ... but I will not speak of *him* — for she is not worthy of him who cannot perceive the difference between gold and tinsel.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I said, angrily, surprised into speaking, which I ought not to have done. ‘I see no gold in the one’ — I thought she was alluding to the Prince — ‘and I am certain there is no tinsel in the other.’

“‘As you please — I tell you’ — and she bent down her head to my ear, and whispered ‘Edward Aubrey is gone to a certain club in M. street — known to everybody but you — and when you imagine he is thinking of you, and waiting to dance with you, and what not, he has the dice-box in his hand, and is playing for enormous sums at hazard.’

“And she turned away and disappeared in the crowd.

“I did not know what to do — I should have despised the information two or three hours ago; but now something within me urged that it tallied strangely with what had passed between us this evening — when he had seemed to confess that something was amiss in his conduct, and promise it should immediately be reformed. Was it possible? — and had he left my mother’s house at such a moment, and me, and Algernon, and all of us, for a base indulgence like

this? — and more, was he at that very instant upon the brink of a precipice — playing for enormous sums — ‘risking his honour,’ she said — Oh! miserable infatuation!

“I felt so sick and ill, I could hardly keep myself from falling upon the ground. I got up and tried to return to the house; I could not — I was obliged to sit down again.

“And then came to my assistance that one who had saved my life a short time ago.

“Suddenly, as if he had been somewhere close by all the time, and had seen me change colour and feel so ill — the very man most desirable for me at that moment to see — William Aubrey, Edward’s brother, stood before me, saying, ‘You seem ill. Has that mask said anything to annoy you?’ — He spoke so kindly and gently, and with such a protecting tone! as if he could and would ward all evil from me — save me from sorrow as he had already saved me from death!

“It is quite strange how his tone of voice and the look which accompanied it seemed to say all this; and how I at once felt as if I could lean upon him and trust him as the wisest and tenderest of brothers.

“But he is Edward’s brother.

“I looked up at him, and my eyes filled with tears in spite of myself.

“‘What *can* be the matter?’ he said anxiously.

“‘Oh! Mr. Aubrey! — it is dreadful what that mask said to me.’

“‘What could she say? — Dreadful! — What dared she to say?’

““Oh! Mr. Aubrey! — Edward — Captain Aubrey — your brother.’

“He went a little paler — he is usually pale — and his lips looked white, but

““What of him?’ was all he uttered.

““That mask says ...’

““But who believes what masks say?” he interrupted.

““Nobody? — May one pay no attention to what masks say?’

““Very little, I should think.’

““But this was so terrible — so terrible!’

““Sweet Lady Emma,’ sitting down by me, and just laying his hand upon mine, which was trembling upon the bench, and doing this so kindly, so like a brother — as I am sure he feels, and is to me — ‘Had you not better tell me at once what is so terrible? In all probability I may be able to assure you whether you ought to believe it or not.’

““She says — she says — that Edward — Captain Aubrey — I mean your brother — Oh! Mr. William! — Mr. Aubrey! — he is at this very moment at some club — I forget the name, and don’t know it — but he has gone away from my mother’s party, and is at this very moment playing hazard, and for enormous sums, she says.’

““I don’t believe a word of it.’

“I could not help turning suddenly round and I don’t know what I said for very joy.

“The colour flew up into his face.

“I loved him all the better for being so indignant in his brother’s cause.

““Oh! bless you! bless you! for saying that. But are you sure — can you be quite, quite, quite, sure?”

“And I fairly burst into tears.

“I could not help it. I know I ought — but I could *not* help it. I was so glad — it was such a relief.

“I fairly sobbed aloud.

““Are you quite, quite sure? Tell me again — tell me you are quite, quite sure.”

“He seemed as if he could not very easily speak himself at that moment, but he pressed the hand that lay under his.

“He seemed struggling with himself, struggling to keep down his feelings — he tried to speak once, twice, three times.

“William Aubrey has the softest, most feeling nature in the world.

““Quite sure?” I sobbed out again.

““Quite sure,” he said at last, in an odd, hollow sort of voice — he must have been perfectly overcome with feeling — “As sure as one man can be of another, whose conduct he never in his life had occasion to condemn.”

“I looked suddenly up at him — oh! so gratefully, as he said this; but I was shocked when I saw his face — he seemed like one struggling for life — as if some terrible hand was clutching at his breast and choking him. His face had quite changed.

““What is the matter, Mr. Aubrey?”

“I thought he was suddenly taken very ill.

““Matter!” said he, in a melancholy tone, his countenance suddenly collapsing; “What matters it?”

“And then his eyes fell upon me with so piteous

an expression — that I could not help fearing all was not right.

“‘But why do you look as you do? if Edward be what you say ...’

“‘*Then* nothing in creation can go wrong,’ he said, with a faint smile.

“‘I don’t mean that — I know you may have troubles of your own — but just now ...’

“‘I *have* troubles of my own — and why not just now?’

“‘The joy to find Edward guiltless?’

“‘I always believed him not only to be without guilt, but almost without blemish,’ was his answer.

“And like one who has gained some great victory, as he said this, his face suddenly lighted up all in a glorious glow.

“What a heart he has! — What sympathy in his brother’s welfare! — but they are all so proud of him, and well they may.

“I did not say thank you — thank you — though my heart said it, and I dare say my eyes said it. Now I was less uncomfortable — I began to feel a little ashamed of what I had been saying to Edward’s brother — my heart was lightened of its burden, and I endeavoured to behave myself, and recollect what I was about.

“So I sat still a little time, and then I withdrew my hand which he still was holding in his, and said, I felt rather cold, and perhaps we had better go into the house again.

“He looked wistfully at me, as if he had something more that he wanted to say — then gave a heavy sigh. — Such a sigh, Mary, it seemed to come from

the very bottom of the heart; and rising, asked me 'whether I would take his arm?'

"I was so shaken, and so tired, and so completely *down*, with one thing or another, that I was glad enough to take it — but how his was trembling!

"This is all very odd and disagreeable; don't you think so, Mary? — I do not know what to make of it.

"In the first place there is no doubt that Captain Aubrey was gone. Unless, indeed, he returned masked. But that I think he hardly would have done and not have spoken to me. And it is certain that no other mask addressed me during the remainder of the evening.

"Then this extreme emotion and depression upon the part of William Aubrey, coupled with that cloud which certainly did at times come over his brother's face — and his owning, almost, that he had done something which he did not approve of, and his sort of promise to me that it should be amended!

"One feels so inexperienced, so ignorant of things. Going stumbling along in this great dreary world around us — not knowing whither we turn — or what we see. . . . All in a sort of twilight obscurity. — Oh, for a friend! — I do so want a friend — a brother! — Dear Algernon! — I do love you dearly — dearly — but what I want is a wise friend.

"My mother, as you well know, is far too busy for friendship. She has ~~not~~ time, even if she had inclination, to listen to a girl's idle talk and difficulties. But I need not call this idle talk or girlish difficulty — it is a very very serious thing. The whole

happiness of my existence — I know it, and feel it — is involved in the question of Edward's integrity.

"Oh! how I wish William Aubrey were anything in the world but Edward's brother. I would rather ask his advice than that of any one I know. But one cannot — it is not maidenly to show so much interest to a man's own brother — it is like showing it to himself.

"Surely, he would tell me the truth. If he is not truthful, who is? I never saw a more truthful countenance — I can fancy dear Edward telling a white lie now and then, for fun, or gallantry; but William never.

"His face is the very mirror of plainness and truth — so gentle, yet so sincere.

"But then, to betray his brother's secret infirmities to me! — what brother? — what man of honour and feeling could bear to do it? And probably — nay, I am sure of it — he thinks his brother is about to amend his faults.

"Did not Edward promise me?

"But where was he yesterday evening?

"Who shall tell me — how shall I learn?

"I must learn — I must and will know.

"Mary! Mary! I have it.

"I will ask himself!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Your brother — no, no brother, yet the son —

Yet not the son — I will not call him son —

Of him I was about to call his father. —

AS YOU LIKE IT.

WILLIAM AUBREY returned home in a state of agitation and distress that was piteous.

His heart overflowing with jealousy, with envy, with a sort of wild despair. There could be no doubt of it, — the sweet creature loved his brother. The heart he had all along allowed himself to consider as his own lawful possession, and which, as has been said, with a strange self-flattery he had believed he was far better calculated to obtain, and more deserving of than Edward could be — was already given away.

Every sentence that fell from her lips — the expression of her eyes, the tones of her voice — all her innocent undisguise of manner — at once made him sensible of the value of the heart he so much prized, and that it was lost to him for ever.

How should he bear it?

And then his thoughts turned to reflect upon what she had told him, and passed to a severe scrutiny upon the integrity of his own answers, an integrity which had cost such an effort that he shuddered at the temptation he had gone through, for well he knew that one word of his in confirmation of what she

dreaded might have sufficed to open her eyes and sever that tie, — the existence of which was worse than death to him.

Then the tempter within began to argue and question with — almost to blame, him. Why must he take upon himself to advocate his brother's cause? Why not have seized the opportunity to plead his own — To point out the difference between the two, and to persuade her of that which he himself sincerely believed — that of the two Captain Aubrey was not the man best formed to make her happy?

Of this fact he felt more than ever persuaded by what had passed that night — when she had shown so much sensibility and right feeling.

And why, then, must he, from an exaggerated sense of honour, do what in him lay to confirm her partiality for his brother? Was Edward indeed as deserving as the world gave him credit for being, or was he nothing more than a brave, brilliant, and fashionable young man, without either conduct or solidity — incapable through his intellectual habits of that life of the soul for which he himself alone desired to exist — and which this lovely creature appeared so well formed to share?

And so he allowed himself to play the casuist with his conscience. And thus that first step towards wrongdoing was taken, — wherein a man suffers himself after an action of this nature rather to regret the sacrifice than rejoice at the victory.

The man who does this is preparing to yield upon the next occasion.

And so William walked musingly home — a thorough egotist — though by no means a selfish man.

And many such there are who, because they are neither of unjust, nor ungenerous habits, live on regardless of this absorption into self — this reference of all things to self, which gradually impairs every finer moral quality.

So entirely, indeed, were his thoughts engaged in this manner that he had quite overlooked what Lady Emma had told him of his brother, until entering the dining-room, upon his return home, he found his father seated there.

He was about to retire, for he was in no humour for conversation; but his father, turning round, said,

“Is it you, William? Come in — I am alone.”

William obeyed.

“Where is Edward?” asked Mr. Aubrey, as his son approached the table, and stood there, hat in hand, without sitting down. “Where is your brother? I thought you had been together at the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux’s masquerade. Did you not see him there?”

“Yes,” said William, “he was there, — not masked, but in dress uniform.”

“I am glad of that — I could not have endured that he should have made a tom-fool of himself. But why is he not come home with you?”

“Nay, Sir — I have again to repeat — I am not my brother’s keeper. Edward has his own hours, and pursues his own plans — and what am I, that I should interfere with them?”

“Did you leave him, then, at the ball?”

“He was not to be seen there when I came away, but that is nothing — he might have masked and as-

sumed a character at the end of the evening — many, I know, did so.”

“Then you were not aware of his presence — You do not know, in fact, whether you left him at the ball or not? Is that what you intend to say?”

“Precisely.”

“I have not been very well these last two days,” Mr. Aubrey went on, after a short silence, “or I should have gone to this ball myself. I want to see the young lady who, you assure me, forms the excuse for Edward’s late hours — and for his indifference to my wishes in that respect. But I am not well — I don’t know how it is exactly with me.”

“What is the matter, Sir?” going up to him immediately.

Mr. Aubrey laid his hand upon his son’s arm.

“A worn-out life —”

“But you are young, Sir, quite young — You should not suffer yourself to fancy such things — Men have been commanding armies and ruling nations, at an age far exceeding yours.”

“Possibly so. — But my life has been a wearying one — busy and prosperous, yet yielding little satisfaction. I have amassed money. I have risen to the summit of my ambition, as regards this world. I have succeeded in everything that I have undertaken . . . to find, that all is vanity and vexation of spirit. — A hollow deception all. What I have most desired has proved most tasteless when attained. Apples of Sodom! — Apples of Sodom! — There is no one good thing under the sun!”

“I am sorry,” William replied gravely, “when I hear any man, and most of all you, Sir, confess to

the discovery of that, which I have found out almost since I could think at all."

"You!"

"And why not I?" said William, with some impatience, "Is my lot in life so particularly fortunate, that I should escape the longings and the regrets which are the portion of most men?"

"Those are more sick who surfeit on too much, than those who starve upon too little," was his father's answer. "William — why are you always harping upon that string? — Do you envy your brother?"

"Yes," said William firmly, "I do."

"Base passion," muttered his father, "Then I was not deceived in my opinion. — I always thought you of a totally different nature — scarcely could believe you of the same blood. As your brother — You! you have sucked in baseness with your mother's —"

"No, not mother's," interrupted William, in a sullen voice.

"Well, then, your nurse's milk — you are not like a son of mine — you are the very reverse in all things to Edward."

"Yes, Sir — no one feels and knows that more sensibly than I do, but it remains to be proved whether I alone am capable of the miserable passion of envy. Strip him as I stand here stripped — of everything that can render life desirable — and endow me with all man covets upon earth, and we shall see how he will stand the test."

"I would back him against ten thousand."

William said no more.

There was silence for a few moments, then Mr. Aubrey began again.

"Why *can* he not come home?"

William answered nothing.

"Was the ball over when you came away? Did you see nothing whatever of him?"

"Nothing."

"Nor happen to hear anything?"

"How should I hear anything of him?" said William, evasively.

"You did hear something of him then," cried Mr. Aubrey, starting from his reclining posture in the arm-chair, and sitting upright, and I desire that you will hide nothing, but tell me frankly what it was you heard."

"Nay, Sir — is not that requiring too much of me? Am I good for nothing better than to be a fetch and carrying tale bearer?" William replied, with a good deal of emotion.

"Tale bearer! This is not the first time you have offended me by these sort of insinuations. Be it as you will . . . You refuse to assist your father, whose only object in life is, as you well know, the welfare and security of your brother. Be it as you please. I ask no more questions."

"I beg your pardon, Sir — I was far from intending to offend you; but will you not see — can you help seeing — that nothing upon earth could lead to such ill constructions upon myself as the carrying defaming reports — which I am convinced are false — to you, the father of my brother."

"I will be the judge of that — I will stand you security as to that. You *have* heard something, then — tell me, William, what is it?"

As he was speaking, the door bell was heard to ring.

"Here he comes — ask himself," said William.

"It is his footstep in the hall; he is going up stairs. Bid him come in to me."

William opened the dining-room door slowly, and unwillingly; at that moment he could scarcely bear to look upon his brother's countenance.

"Edward!"

Captain Aubrey turned — Such a troubled face was displayed.

"My father wants to speak with you."

"My father! — I thought he had been in bed hours ago."

"No — he is up, and not quite well."

"Not well!" — hastily turning, and entering the room — "not well! Sir — my dear father — what is the matter? Indeed, you do not look well."

"Edward," said Mr. Aubrey, and he held out his hand to his son, "if you are well, I am well, and all is as it should be. You are come home straight from this ball — I thank you for this condescension to an old man's wishes."

"Sir," cried Edward, and a fine colour flew into his face, "I am not."

But Mr. Aubrey turned so pale, that the words he was about to speak — the confession he was about to make — were arrested. He stopped suddenly, looking confused and annoyed.

"You mean to say, then," said Mr. Aubrey, looking steadily at him, while his face grew darker and paler every moment, "that what I so earnestly desire has not been done — that this night is as other nights."

Well, well — it is what fathers must look for from their sons — I was but a fool to expect different treatment from mine.”

“Don’t speak in that way, my dear father. You know it is my pleasure, as it is my highest duty, to consult your wishes; but forgive me — it is impossible to be always what others desire one to be — what one desires one’s self to be”

“You have been playing again, then, I am to understand. . . . And what have you lost, young man? Come — be candid. What am I to advance for you?”

“Playing — who told you I ever played?” cried Edward, angrily, glancing at his brother. “William consent to be a spy!”

“You need not cast such looks at your brother, Edward. I have not my information from him. He regards neither my interest nor yours in preserving this obstinate silence with respect to the manner in which you spend your time. But at least he deserves no other reproach at your hands.”

“I beg your pardon, William — I sincerely beg your pardon,” cried Edward, turning suddenly to his brother, and taking his hand and pressing it warmly. “Forgive me — I have behaved shamefully. Forgive me, William — brother.”

A pang shot through William’s heart as he looked upon Edward’s manly, affectionate countenance, whilst saying this. He envied him — in those bitter moments he envied him even his good qualities, wretched man that he was!

Mr. Aubrey looked on without betraying any emotion in his countenance, yet his heart swelled, and yearned towards his eldest son.

Reserved, cold, saturnine, as was his own temper, the genial warmth of Edward's manner sent a glow of delight, as it were, through his whole frame.

But his anxiety as to the main subject upon which his suspicions had been awakened was only increased by the admission Edward had made. It was plain that he considered himself in his brother's power, and was most grateful for William's silence.

"Edward! — turn this way. Let me look in your face, Sir, and do you the same by me. It is well — or rather it is very far from well. Something is wrong here," and he laid his hand upon his son's breast.

"Wrong — wrong — aye a thousand things wrong," was Edward's reply. "Could you suppose, Sir, kind and partial as you are, that I could be an angel, exempt from human faults and infirmities? But do not ask me further — what I could tell you it might give you great pain to know. Be satisfied, dear Sir, I have no gaming debts, upon my honour I have not one."

"Then it is because fortune has been favourable. Oh! my son! how can you bear the reflection! Other men's money! Money they can ill spare, perhaps, in your purse. Do you think it was the expectation of having your debts to pay that made me uneasy. Go and spend your money honourably, young man, as you used to do, and see if your father will ever grudge to supply it."

"Sir! father!" cried Edward, greatly moved, "you have said enough. I have played, I own it, but I have done for ever. Ask me no questions about the past, the answers would only give you pain. Be

satisfied, dear father. I am sick and disgusted with the past. I *have* played. I will play no more."

Mr. Aubrey held out his hand, Edward took it with reverend affection. Then perceiving how pale his father looked, he begged of him so affectionately to go to bed; assured him so seriously that this should be the last time that he should have reason to complain of him, that his father went up to his chamber more delighted with him than ever. There was something in the warm cordiality of Edward's nature that exercised a species of fascination over every one with whom he came into close connexion.

All save one, and his connexion with him, near as was the realationship, could not, perhaps, be called close.

CHAPTER XIV.

Beshrew me but I love her heartily;
For she is wise, if I can judge of her;
And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true;
And true she is, as she hath proved herself.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

So things went on for some little time.

Edward abstained from even visiting the Club, and was less with Lord Algernon in consequence. That young nobleman, indeed, seemed indifferent to his, or to any company or occupation save one — his time and his thoughts were swallowed up in gaming, to which an extraordinary run of luck tempted him more than ever.

Ascot races occurred at the end of this period, and to them, with all the rest of the world, the party with whom we have to do went.

The Marquis of Hurstmonceaux had taken a house on the skirts of Cranbourne Chase, and was there with the Marchioness, Lady Emma, and a large party of friends, among whom the Prince of C. C. made one.

Edward Aubrey was upon the course, and so was William; the latter drawn there by an attraction which he felt to be fatal to his peace, and contrary to every habit of his former self — the other agonising with jealousy, watching the figure of the girl he so tenderly loved — seated in the Grand Stand, surrounded by admirers.

She was beautifully dressed in abundance of white muslin and lace, with a bonnet trimmed with delicate pink flowers, and a rich Brussels lace veil hanging from it, and falling softly all round her face; and her blue eyes smiled sweetly, and her lovely lips were prattling so pleasantly, as she turned from one to the other, apparently in the highest spirits.

He sat there, idly leaning upon the fine chesnut horse which carried him, his eyes turned upon that group above, indifferent to all besides — the clamorous throng, the bawling voices, the hum of business from the betting-stand, the hurry and excitement as the beautiful animals which were to contend for the prize appeared, mounted by the light jockeys in their black caps, bright silken vests, glanced gaily under a brilliant sun, and ambled gently up and down the course, displaying their forms and their paces to the anxious eyes of those who had thousands and thousands depending upon the issue — and to the admiration of those who were only there to see and be seen. It was all nothing to Edward.

He sees but one.

She is gay and animated. He watches that thrill of girlish surprise and pleasure, at the bright scene at which she is present for the first time of her life — her delight at the beauty of the glorious day — exhilarated as she is by its warmth, and the sweet freshness of a high breeze that blows over those heathy downs — he sees her, stretching forward to gaze — as fresh object succeeds to object, and then turning round and appearing to prattle so gayly and prettily with those about her, and looking so happy!

And there he sits without spirits to enter the Stand,

and mingle with the group around her; oppressed with many a painful reflection, but most of all by that one bitter thought — that she could be so joyous and happy and he away. It was plain she cared little for him — perhaps not at all.

And — ah! — ah!

Here he comes — and the colour flies into her beautiful face, and her eyes flash brighter than ever.

At least he thought so — and rage in his heart, would fain have turned away — but he was as one fascinated to the spot — he could not move.

But was it as he imagined?

So it might appear, indeed; but little did he know what was passing in that young heart.

She had seen him sitting there.

One glance had assured her that he was present and watching her — that she was the sole object of his attention in the midst of the bustling crowd — and that assurance it was which had sent the blood to her cheek and given fresh sweetness and brilliancy to her eyes — and too delighted was she to show that others were attentive when he was negligent and unkind — for why did he not come into the Stand when she was there? She was vexed and wished to give him a little pain — and so, when the Prince of C. C. joined the party, whose attentions, as I said before, were the acknowledged standard of success — the grand triumph of the season — she stealing a little naughty glance down, and seeing him still sitting there watching and looking, as she thought, charming, seated in that negligent manner upon his beautiful horse, for once indulged the true spirit of coquetry, — and the bright

cheek and the flashing eye answered to the exulting heart.

She welcomed the Prince with smiles so sweet that he, old experienced stager as he was, thought that he had never seen a creature so bewitching, and he began, at that moment, really to feel an odd, almost forgotten, sensation, as if there was something called a heart yet beating within him, and as if it was being literally a *little* touched. He was surprised at himself — but the sensation was rather agreeable. It reminded him of early days — days gone long ago, when he was a calf of a boy, and fancied himself in love.

So his countenance responded, far more than responded to hers, and, like a flattering glass, gave extreme beauty to his expression, and there was a touch of almost natural tenderness about it, so that Lady Emma herself began to be a little moved, more than she had ever thought it possible she could be moved by any face but that one — which was so dear to her.

What Edward saw with such bitter feelings of despair was but a momentary forgetfulness. Lady Emma began with the innocent desire of enhancing her value in the eyes of the man she loved, and ended, by suffering herself to be, for a short moment, fascinated by the dangerous one whom, in her heart, she cared not for.

Oh, world! world! with what snares dost thou encompass the heedless and the young!

Emma ceased to look down towards him, as he sat there below, and turned away to the prince, and they too were soon seated together, engaged in a conversation which appeared but too interesting to the wretched observer. She bending her head and listening, her

colour rising and falling upon her cheek, and he, his proud head bent downwards, seeming to think of nothing but her.

And it was very pleasant for this *blasé*, blighted man of the world to fancy himself thinking of nothing but her.

She was a sweet creature certainly, there was something so *naïve*, so spirited — united to such perfect ton and good manners! — thus thought he.

He should trifle away the remainder of his stay in England very pleasantly in her company, and how could he amuse himself better?

How little did she guess what was passing in his mind, or understand those eyes, so well taught to tell a tale of false and most delusive tenderness. How little did she know the nature of that delusion which was leading her fancy, for the moment, astray.

She was so young, and had been so little instructed in what was right, that she was not aware how pernicious a thing it was for her own heart, thus to be trifling with its affections — far, far less could she dream of the fatal consequences of that hour.

They were, one and all of them, in truth, in the same case, wandering bewildered in the labyrinth of this world — in the entanglement of their own wishes, feelings, and inclinations — none of them looking either to the right hand or to the left — none of them choosing or directing their course — all blindly following the path to which the fancy of the moment led them.

The prince yielded to the vain pleasure of trifling with his own and her feelings, and she suffered vanity and imagination to bewitch her for the time.

But Edward — what did he do?

Much as he did on a former occasion.

His first impulse was to dismount from his horse, throw his bridle to his groom — come into the Grand Stand and confound her by one look — one look would be enough.

But as his foot was upon the stairs, a set of young men, laughing and talking, came hurrying down; the start was about to be made, and they were hastening to the betting-stand, to look after their bets. Edward wanted strength of purpose enough to enable him to stem this torrent — he suffered it to sweep him before it — and it swept him into the betting-stand.

There stood Algernon, flushed with recent victories, both upon the turf and at the table — intoxicated with the deceitful wealth thus showered upon him by fortune — confiding in his own good star, he was betting with a reckless defiance of everything.

As soon as he saw Edward, he crossed the Stand, and, seizing him by the arm, cried,

“And where have you been hiding yourself for these last ten days, my good fellow? Just in time! Ten to one — the favourite against the field. Take the bet, — I have taken it in thousands. There is not a doubt about the matter — I know her, and all about her. She will carry all before her — See! see!” — and he turned him round as he spoke — “there she comes — What shape! — What a spring! — What bone; yet what lightness! Here, Stanhope, Aubrey’ll take your bet, if you’ll have any more.”

“Yes,” replied a dark, ill-looking man of about fifty, with thick set figure, and hair combed straight down over his forehead, “I am ready to take Captain Aubrey — but he must speak quick, for I am not so

sure of my field but what I must be allowed time for hedging."

"Come, Aubrey" —

"As you will," said Edward, careless of everything — of his father — of his implied promise — "ten to one — against the field; which way is it? — I never know — in five hundreds — just as you choose."

For from where he stood his eye commanded the Grand Stand displayed there before him like a bed of flowers — and among those beautiful creatures he saw one leaning forward, with girlish eagerness, over the balustrade — and asking questions, with breathless impatience, from him who leaned over too — but seemed to see nothing but herself.

"As you will," he said.

"Will you not write it down in your betting-book?"

"I have not one. Write it you down, Algernon — what is it?"

"Sir — Captain Aubrey —"

He turned, for some one touched his elbow.

There was so great a crowd that it was almost impossible to move — but an arm was stretched towards him.

"Captain Aubrey —"

And, pale with emotion — his eyes straining to catch his — his arm anxiously pressed forwards to seize his arm, Aubrey beheld Mountford struggling to make his way through the closely packed figures that stood around him.

The poor boy's face was working with anxiety and impatience — the cold dew stood upon his forehead — but he could not reach Edward.

"Captain Aubrey!" —

That was all he seemed able to utter.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen — will you make way for a friend of mine, who seems to have something to say to me?"

"Oh," said Mr. Stanhope, having entered his bet into his book with great deliberation, "I beg your pardon" — then turning round as he made way —

"Mr. Mountford," — he muttered with a faint sneer — as the pale, lank boy pushed forward — and the press giving way, he laid hold of Edward's arm.

"Captain Aubrey," he whispered, "come to the window, will you, out of hearing of these men — I have something to say to you."

Edward yielded, with his usual good nature, to the anxious impatience of the boy, and suffered himself to be led to the other side of the place.

"It's a great liberty — but I owe you so much. They would half murder me if they knew — that Stanhope . . . You haven't — I hope you haven't been betting upon the favourite."

"I don't very well know what I have been doing — I have done as Algernon bade me . . . he knows — I know nothing of these things — Why? — what's the matter? . . ."

"I hope you'll forgive me, Captain Aubrey, I hope it's no very large sum."

"I'm sure I don't know; let me calculate; if I lose — on my life but there goes five thousand," cried he, aghast — "What have I been about, moon-calfing in this way — and my father! — well, I suppose I shall win — the favourite's sure of the day."

"But she isn't, she isn't — you won't win it, you

won't indeed. Oh, if there were only time for you to hedge."

"But there is not — they are starting — they are gone!"

"There is yet time to hedge, Captain Aubrey — and — Oh! I beseech you, listen to me —" as Edward said somewhat impatiently, "Lord Algernon assures me that the favourite must win."

"Oh, hedge! hedge!" cried the boy in an agony — "the favourite will *not* win — I know it will not win — it cannot win — they have taken good care it shall not win. Oh, Captain Aubrey, there is still time, hedge — hedge."

"I hope," said Edward, gravely eyeing the youngster as he spoke, "that you, possessing some information that others do not, or, at least, imagining you do, which amounts to the same thing, have not been taking the field against the favourite."

Mountford's eye fell at this speech, and the colour flew to his face, but it was merely a nervous sense of shame, at having been thought capable of such a meanness.

His face resumed its natural hue, and his eye was, for once, steady and true, as he answered.

"No, upon my honour, I have not."

"That's right," said Edward, and hastened away as if there was nothing else that he cared for.

Mountford was dull enough in his perceptions, but he understood this, and it made him feel more grateful than ever.

"He cares more for my honourable conduct than for five thousand pounds!" was his mental exclamation — then, following him, — "but, Captain Aubrey —"

"Well, well, well." Edward's eyes were again fixed upon the Grand Stand.

"By Jove, they are coming up! — The favourite is leading — hedge — hedge, dear Captain Aubrey! Any odds against the field will be taken now — Captain Aubrey! — Captain Aubrey! — the favourite will come in second — I know it — I know it!"

"If," said Edward, coolly turning round, "you mean that you have private information of your own, of which others are ignorant,"

"I have, I have!" — breathless with impatience — "Oh, for heaven's sake —"

"Then what I would not have you do, *I* will not do —"

"But the case is so different — what will you not do?"

"Profit by it."

"But *you* — you have been taken in by a rascal, with whom no scores are to be kept. — Oh! oh! Too late! too late! — It is as I said — the favourite — the favourite."

And the race rushed by —

The favourite lost it by half a neck.

Edward felt a cold chill over his whole frame — he turned pale. — Mountford saw his changed countenance, and turned paler still.

"You care to lose this money," he said in a low voice, bringing his mouth close to Edward's ear.

"I cannot help caring for it," said Edward, endeavouring to look composed — "It is a large sum — and my father, who is not well, will be vexed at it — Not that he would care for the money, if spent in an

honourable way — but thus! — and after what I said not ten days ago! — fool! — madman! — fool!”

This he muttered to himself, and turned to the window, and leaned out to hide his agitation.

Mountford stood silently by for a short time — his face working in a strange manner — now red — now deadly pale.

“You excused me a much larger sum than that,” he said at last, leaning out of the window by Edward’s side, and speaking in a low, faltering voice — “I owe you that and a great deal more; why cannot I brave *my* father’s anger, rather than you should brave yours. I ought to say, Captain Aubrey, I will pay you the five thousand I owe you. I ought to go to *my* father — and not you to yours — I know that I ought — but — but —”

“You cannot — I thank you for thinking of it — but never mind, I know you fear your father — that is a terrible feeling, poor fellow. It must be dreadful to see a father really angry — to be cast off” he went on talking indistinctly to himself, “as this poor fellow’s father would cast him off if he knew the scrape he has got himself into. That would indeed be insupportable — the shame and the sorrow! — My father! — he will suffer — but he will forgive — He is severe, but he is generous — he will blame, but he will forgive — but as for this poor timid lad! No, it must not be thought of.”

He had been tempted to accept the poor boy’s offer at first, he so dreaded the giving pain to his father, — but these last considerations prevailed. The next thought was — Algernon has had a run of luck, he owes me

money, I will ask *him*. My father must not know of this folly. It would half kill him.

He drew himself in from the window, and turned round to look for Algernon, but Algernon was no longer to be seen. In his place came up Mr. Stanhope — who was in truth a regular professional — he held his betting-book in his hand. There was a sort of bustle on the Stand, and Edward perceived that a good deal of murmuring and discussion was going on. Mr. Stanhope, however, approached in the blandest manner, saying,

“Captain Aubrey — If it will be perfectly convenient to you as I have not the honour of your personal acquaintance, perhaps —”

“Five thousand, is it not? — I have not the money about me.”

“Not of the slightest importance — an I. O. U. or any memorandum of that sort from a gentleman of Captain Aubrey’s known honour will be sufficient. I regret to say — that as I am obliged to leave England for Paris to-morrow morning early, I shall wish to get the bill discounted to-night — or by ten o’clock to-morrow, when the West End banks open, will do, should that suit Captain Aubrey’s convenience better.”

“Of course,” said Edward, somewhat angrily, “You don’t suppose I can chuck away five thousand pounds as boys chuck cherry-stones. I must provide to take up the memorandum, as you call it, when it comes to my banker for payment.”

“No doubt, no doubt, but Captain Aubrey’s agent —”

“Is not in the habit of being asked for large advances, Sir. Will you please to give me a leaf of

your pocket-book, that I may write what you require?"

Which he did, and was about to hand it to Mr. Stanhope, when he was again interrupted by Mountford, who said, "Stay, Captain Aubrey, there is a discussion going on — there was not fair play."

"Sir," said Mr. Stanhope, opening wide his eyes, "what do you presume to insinuate?"

Poor Mountford looked somewhat startled at this question, which was put with all the arrogant defiance of a bravo — the stern, black, daring eye of the gambler, seeming, as it were, to pierce through the vitals of the nervous, irresolute young man before him: who turned very pale, and visibly trembled.

This added fresh strength to Mr. Stanhope's resolution to carry the question by main force.

"Mr. Mountford," he said, eyeing him, "in another place, and at another time, I will ask for an explanation of this ungentlemanlike and uncalled-for interference. With respect to there having been, or having not been, what you are pleased to call, fair play, I do profess myself to be ignorant, having no acquaintance among those blackguards with whom Mr. Mountford seems to be upon such confidential terms, gentry ready with any scandalous pretence to evade the payment of their debts of honour — Sir, the bet between Captain Aubrey and myself, is an affair between gentlemen, with whom *you* can have little to do."

The insolence called a hectic colour to the lad's cheeks, but he seemed ready to sink into the earth with shame, at the turn affairs were taking.

It was but too true, he was upon very intimate terms of acquaintanceship with many of the jockeys,

and those not the most respectable of the body, as also with various grooms, hangers-on about the stables, and that sort of people, which, in his perverted ambition to be thought a regular man of the world, he had considered as just the thing — and therefore, that conscience, which makes cowards of us all, responded to the accusations thus heaped upon him. It was certain, that from a hanger-on of this description, he had obtained the secret, that the favourite had certainly been physicked before she started, and he had recompensed the man for his intelligence by a five-pound note. He now felt heartily ashamed of what he had done, and there he stood, blushing and stammering, and casting a wistful eye at Captain Aubrey.

Edward was touched by the appeal, and he said quietly, but with decision —

“How Mr. Mountford obtained the intelligence, which, unfortunately came too late for any one to profit by it, I should suppose is at least no affair of Mr. Stanhope’s —”

“Pardon me, Sir,” was the reply, with a look of withering contempt at the miserable caitiff, who stood there looking like the most abject criminal, “so long as Mr. Mountford pleases to keep his romantic inventions to himself, so long he is at liberty to enjoy them — and, he may make use of them to evade as many bets as he pleases, for anything I care. *I* never accept such things from children, who go mewling and crying when they are called upon to pay — but when babies presume to interfere in the affairs of men and gentlemen, I shall take the liberty of showing them, that I, for one, have my own peculiar remedy for these sort of proceedings.....”

And he made a very significant gesture.

"You may spare yourself the trouble, Mr. Stanhope, of correcting that gentleman, his education, I presume, has not been entrusted to your hands. As regards the little account between ourselves, I beg to say, that I am ready to give you my note of hand for it. I consider that I incurred the debt, and I shall pay it."

And with apparent coolness he placed the paper he held in Mr. Stanhope's hand.

But, having done so, he looked round for Lord Algernon, for his heart was sinking at the thought of his father, so unfit, at this moment, to bear any hurry or anxiety — but Lord Algernon was not to be seen.

Edward was leaving the Stand in order to search for him, when Mountford again came up, saying, timidly —

"Captain Aubrey, I am ashamed of myself — I do not know what to say in my defence — I thank you exceedingly for supporting me at that critical moment, when Stanhope might have made me the laughing stock of the whole Stand — but you ought not to have paid the money *indeed*." There was so much simple, passionate earnestness in this misguided boy, whenever he was not affecting to ape the manners of men of the world, as he thought, that Edward was quite affected.

"I paid the money," he said, "because I believed that I ought so to do. It was very kind of you, Mountford, to warn me, and if I believed that the horse was really physicked, I should hesitate, I confess, as to what I ought to do — but I have just overheard what Mr. Cottenham has been assuring

Lord Baynforth is the truth — that the dose was an innocent one, and administered by the connivance of the groom and jockey — in order to be set up as a pretext for not paying the bets, incurred in case the favourite lost. This being so, there was no doubt as to the obligation — and now,” added he, taking Mountford’s arm, as they descended the steps of the Stand together, “may I say one word more — Will Mr. Mountford again lay himself under the possibility of receiving a lesson from Mr. Stanhope? — Will he be, not only an intimate acquaintance, but suffer himself to be made the tool of the low and designing people who engage in these scandalous intrigues?”

Again Mountford coloured, and he made as if he would withdraw the arm which Edward held.

He was still so foolish as to feel inclined to resent, instead of gratefully accepting the other’s disinterested advice.

He was still jealous of being treated like a boy.

But Edward was most indulgent of nature, and nothing could weary or offend him when he hoped to do good. He had been too much in the habit of forbearance as regarded those under his command on ship-board, to be lightly offended or easily turned from a benevolent purpose.

“Excuse me, Mountford,” he said, “but I seem to feel as if I had known you for years, — and, besides, you have laid me, to-day, under a very serious obligation, by your kind endeavours to save me from heavy loss. Remember, too, that I am a mere seaman, and, as such, accustomed to feel strongly and speak plainly. You must permit me to say one more word. — Fly low company, as you would the poison of vipers

— assert your better self — weigh the objects of your present ambition at their just value. — What is the applause of a set of men like those you frequent? — Valueless as an object, and, if obtained, to be obtained at the cost of all that is really worthy and honourable within you.”

“But what can I do? — I have nothing better to do.”

“Find something better to do.”

“You have your profession — I have no profession — I am dependent on my father — and he’s made a very large fortune, and he does not like — it would hurt his pride, to see an eldest son of his working to get his living as if he were the son of nobody . . . Besides, he likes to see me in good society — fashionable, you know, and he gives me a very handsome allowance, I must say, and yet he’s the tradesman still, as Holworth says, for he expects me to make it *do* — and if he knew that I did not, or got into debt — as every one of the rest of them does — I don’t know what would become of me. — He’d cast me off as easily as an old glove. . . . But you *are* a true friend, Captain Aubrey — and the first *I* ever met with — and I ought, aye, and by heaven I will,” he added with a glow of generous resolution, seeming for the first time to ennoble him in his own eyes, — “I *will* get this five thousand pounds which I owe you, come what will of it.”

“You shall do no such thing, — You don’t owe it me. — You know I cancelled the debt. — Say no more upon the subject. — That evening was a most painful one to me. — I shall find some other means of getting the money.”

CHAPTER XV.

Peace seemed to reign on the earth, and the
restless head of the ocean
Was for a moment consoled.

LONGFELLOW'S EVANGELINE.

CAPTAIN AUBREY lifted up his eyes at this moment — and whose should they meet but those of Lady Emma.

He and Mountford, during the latter part of this conversation, had left the betting stand, and had continued to make their way amid a crowd of people and carriages; but in the earnestness of their talk they had at length stopped, and without perceiving it they stood close by the panels of a coroneted coach, into which the horses were about to be harnessed.

The ladies who had to leave the course in this carriage, were hurried into it in a very unceremonious manner by the son of one, and brother of the other. — He, who had them in charge, knowing that it was incumbent upon him to see them safely in, before he left the course, which he was in a great hurry to do.

Lord Algernon had entered the grand stand in an impatient manner, pushing with little ceremony through the crowd of men and women, now rapidly leaving the place; the royalties having departed some quarter of an hour ago.

“Come, mother! — Come, Emma! — Where’s Emma?”

“Why are you in such a prodigious hurry, Alger-

non. — There is abundance of time. — Wait a little till the people have had time to defile down stairs. — You know I detest that pushing and knocking about, which one gets among a crowd of women — the rudest and most brutal of all crowds, *I* think; — besides, do you not see that the horses are not yet brought up. — Wait till the carriage comes to the door."

"No, mother, I can't wait — I must be off — I can't wait, I tell you, and I won't wait," — stamping his feet up and down with impatience, — "Where is that girl, Emma? The horses will be here in no time. — You must let me put you into your coach at once — for I must be off. — Where is that girl, Emma? — She'll drive me mad, and you too. — There is nobody to see you to your carriage. — Where is she?"

The Marchioness smiled, and turned her head very slowly round, and then cast her eyes most expressively upon those of her son. There was Emma, upon the other side of her mother, hidden by the ample drapery of the somewhat bulky Marchioness, who was standing up, whilst Emma and the Prince sat upon the bench close behind her, engaged in what appeared very interesting conversation.

The eyes of Lord Algernon followed those of his mother; then he gave a low whistle. "Sits the wind so?" he muttered — then he shook his head, and went up to his sister, and, to the excessive vexation of the Marchioness, broke abruptly into the whispering going on, by saying roughly,

"What the deuce, Emma, do you mean to stay here all day? Don't you see that almost everybody

is gone? Come along — let me put you and my mother into the carriage, for I want to be off — come along.”

And he was putting her arm in his, but the Marchioness interfered, with

“Give *me* one arm, Algernon, and your sister the other. . . . But, I protest” — glancing at the window — “there is such a crowd, I fear we shall never get through three abreast.”

“Oh! never fear. There, Emma — hook on.”

“May I . . . ?”

And his highness had already her arm in his.

Algernon cast another dissatisfied look at his sister; but the lady mother, seeing matters arranged to her satisfaction, was as impatient to proceed as her son could be, and thus they tried to get to the carriage — the arm of the young creature resting upon that of her princely admirer — and so with considerable difficulty they reached the coach, and Emma entered it upon the opposite side from that upon which Captain Aubrey and young Mountford stood talking. And the highness having put the young lady in, and spying something in another quarter which attracted his attention, took his leave, and walked away.

Emma had been separated from her mother in the confusion of the crowd, and she reached the carriage first, and of course seated herself upon the further side. She sat down, and began to amuse herself by looking out of the open window, when lo! close by, but with their backs turned towards her, she saw Captain Aubrey and another young man engaged in conversation.

The carriage was still to all appearance empty, and they were so near to it that she could not help hearing every word that passed, though they spoke low.

And every word did she drink in with an interest that speedily thrust his highness and everything connected with him out of her head.

She had listened with a beating heart, unconscious that she was listening, and had heard what passed — Edward's kind and generous remonstrances with the young man, whom everybody knew, everybody laughed at, everybody encouraged in his folly, and no one on earth *but* Edward had ever thought of taking pity upon, or saving — and she had heard the poor young fellow's reply. Then came the offer of money — the offer to pay a debt, and at a time when it was evident, for some reason or other, that Captain Aubrey wanted a supply very much — and then the generous reply, ending with — “I shall find some other means of getting the money.”

Words never to be forgotten. The speech had sent the blood tingling to her cheeks, and the water stood brimming in her eyes; when at that very moment he looked up, and met those eyes. There was such an expression in them! — but they were instantly withdrawn, and the lids fell, and the eyes were bent upon the ground. But she had not withdrawn the hand — the hand and arm, which, as she had listened, lay upon the open window.

The look could not be mistaken, his old suspicions vanished like a dream, he was at her side in an instant, and her hand in his, and his eyes imploringly raised to her face — “Emma, Emma,” he ventured to say.

She was silent — but the soft colour that mounted to her face, and the eyes for a moment raised, and the look that met his — “Emma — Emma —”

It was the first time that he had ventured to use the endearing expression — a form of address which at once reveals the whole heart — which tells that the barriers of society, however strong — however far apart they may have kept them — are thrown down between those two — henceforth the two are one. She just muttered a response, the only one that could have been as expressive as the appeal —

“Edward.”

He ventured to bend his head and press his lips upon her hand — then he raised his head and said —

“I shall see you again to-morrow.”

“Yes,” was the reply.

“I shall come to your house and see your father. You will not go up to town till Friday. I shall find you at the Holms.”

“Yes —”

And the hand he held began to quiver and tremble a little.

“I shall find him at home soon after breakfast, Emma.”

She hesitated a moment in her answer, and then said —

“I forgot — Not to-morrow, please — He is engaged to drive out, and he is to stay two nights at Lord F.’s, I believe.”

“Cannot I follow him there?”

She blushed and hesitated again, but ended by saying —

“No, please don’t go there — we shall be in town the next day.”

"May I write — may I write to your mother?"

"Yes . . ."

The horses were now being brought up to the carriage, he let go the hand, and she hastily drew herself within, and then she sank back into the corner of the carriage, in a perfect bewilderment of sweet and happy feelings. Princes and nobles, admiration and pleasure all forgotten, and her heart overflowing with the certainty that she was beloved; that she was already in a manner engaged, bound for ever and ever, to one so dear and so worthy.

Her heart was satisfied, and vanity and coquetry were gone for evermore.

She was a nobler creature from that time. A generous, well-placed attachment is the day-spring of a woman's existence. She could not speak — she felt too supremely happy for words — as there she sat, sunk back in the carriage, her handkerchief pressed to her face, though she was not crying.

At last her mother entered.

The young girl's eyes were closed, and her mother, excessively well pleased with the events of the day, thought that quite tired out she had fallen asleep; so she left her to herself, and Emma had the felicity of enjoying her own thoughts undisturbed, whilst the carriage started off for the Holms, the temporary house which the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux had taken, situated about four miles from the Ascot race course.

They were pledged to each other, then —

She loved him. — Not a doubt of it remained upon his mind. — He was of an open, confiding nature —

the jealousy which had tortured him had been in a manner forced upon him; it was in contradiction to his entire temper, and that it was which had rendered it so unsupportable a burden.

The rapture of the return to confidence — perfect entire confidence, filled his heart with felicity great as hers — it could not be greater.

The carriage drove off rapidly. He stood and watched it till it was no longer in sight, and then he turned away to look out for his servant, who was riding about the course, leading his master's horse. As he was wandering about in a rather absent mood, he was startled by the 'hallo' of a horseman, who was leaving the course at a brisk trot, and was very near running over him.

"Hallo! What are you about? Can't you keep out of the way?"

"Oh! I beg you ten thousand pardons, Captain Aubrey."

It was Mr. Stanhope.

The glance, as he looked up, was like cold sleet to the breast of Aubrey. — Yes, it was Mr. Stanhope, and at sight of him all the events of the last two hours, till then forgotten, rushed to his mind, and crimsoning to the temples, he hurried away, impatient to find his horse, and gallop off the course.

He at last found what he sought — but never had Charles, the groom, seen his master in such a humour. — It was the first time in his life that he had ever thought him unjust as well as impatient.

"You rascal!" — with an oath — a thing rarely uttered by his lips — "where have you been all this

time? Is it my business to go hunting you all over the course?"

"I was walking the horses quietly about, just at the place you told me to wait for you, Captain Aubrey" — said Charles, touching his hat respectfully, but with a certain inflexion of the voice which showed he felt hurt.

"Well — well — Give me the bridle. Have you seen Lord Algernon leave the course?"

"No, Sir — but . . ."

And as he spoke, Lord Henry Fitzjames's carriage and four shot by at full speed, filled with young men — and Algernon touched his hat to Aubrey as he passed.

"Where are they going to? — Do you know?" said the master.

"To town, Sir."

"Are you sure?" —

"The servants told me that they were ordered for town immediately the race was over." —

"Very well."

And putting his horse to his full speed, Aubrey quitted the field, and hastened towards London.

His heart and head were in a tumult —

His heart was throbbing with sweet emotions — filled with joy unspeakable at having thus so suddenly attained the consummation of his wishes, and reveling in the bliss which waits upon love declared and returned. He was more than ever charmed with her. There was something so feeling and delicate about her manner — something so more than answering to

what, in his fondest imaginations, he had thought and believed of her!

But then to blight these blessed sensations of security and joy, came the agitating recollection of the situation in which he had just placed himself. The money which, in reckless despair, he had flung away under the cruel disappointment of his dearest hopes. The note of hand, which would probably be presented for payment the very next day, and the total inadequacy of his own resources to meet it.

The attack of illness under which his father was at present labouring combined to increase his distress. Any kind of agitation was strictly forbidden by the medical men. He knew well, as I have said, what his father's opinions were as respected gambling of every description, and though five thousand pounds was no very important sum for one of his large fortune, yet, the loss of five thousand pounds is never a particularly agreeable circumstance to any one, and Mr. Aubrey was a man who, though liberal in his expenditure, yet rated money at its just — perhaps a good deal above its just value. He abhorred extravagance — and looked with no little contempt upon those who carelessly flung away that sinew, not only of war, but of social life.

Edward would have hesitated under any circumstances, in the present state of his father's health, to communicate the intelligence of his engagement, though he knew it would afford him so much pleasure — and now, when it might have served to extenuate what had passed, and sweeten the more disagreeable disclosures he had to make, he felt still more afraid

lest it might increase the danger by multiplying the causes of excitement.

Perplexed and anxious, he reflected as well as the hurry of his rapid course would allow, upon what was to be done; and it was not till he had somewhat abated of his speed, and was pacing his horse through Hyde Park, at that time of day, a solitude deserted by its usual gay inhabitants, that he came at last to a conclusion.

His decision was such as characters generous as his own usually in such cases arrive at, namely, to adopt the alternative least painful to others, and most unpleasant to himself.

He resolved that his father should remain in total ignorance of what had occurred, and that he would apply to Lord Algernon for the money he wanted.

It is always disagreeable to ask for money. Few things are more trying to one species of courage than this. The courage in question is a thing apart from other descriptions of bravery — but it resembles them in this, — that it may spring alike from the basest or from the noblest qualities. Either from a hard insensibility, which defies pain either in the form of receiving or inflicting it — or from a strong moral sense and the habit of doing what is in itself right, however irksome and disagreeable. That it was right in this instance to apply to Lord Algernon, and not to his father, for money, there could be no doubt. Lord Algernon was in his debt for a larger sum than that which he wanted. The entire balance of his winnings upon the not to be forgotten night was still in his hand. It was large, even after poor Mountford's losses had been deducted.

Lord Algernon had, as he sat at the table, offered his share to Edward, saying, — “Here, Aubrey, take it — Five thousand five hundred pounds, I calculate it. Count your money and put it into your pouch.”

But Edward, disgusted at what had passed, and sick at his own success, had left the money upon the table, saying, as he turned away — “We will settle it some other time,” and had quitted the club with Mountford, and so onwards to his own home.

From that hour not one word had passed with regard to this money.

It is dangerous work leaving a sum like this in the hands of an extravagant man. Still more so in those of a gambler. Such men readily forget that what they thus hold will, one day or other, have to be restored. The possession of a large balance at his banker's — let it really belong to whom it may, makes a man feel virtually rich — and if he be one, like too many, who never know the sum total of their debts, — and consider only in the lump that they know they have debts which must some time or other be discharged — it is apt to lead to careless expenditure, even in the best cases. In the one before us the effect had been most perilous, and Lord Algernon had been tempted by it to incur risks which otherwise he could not have ventured upon. He had, however, been very successful — his run of luck had been astonishing — and he went down to Ascot a rich man — confiding almost blindly in his good fortune, and expecting by his book there to double his gains.

Edward had been made acquainted with his success

— rather by common report among mutual friends than from anything Lord Algernon had himself said. He was aware, too, that he must have lost at Ascot — but had no reason to suppose to any great amount — so that he had no scruples, except those of mere delicacy, in asking for his money. And feelings of this sort he determined, without hesitation, to overcome.

So having arrived at this conclusion, he gave his tired horse time to breathe, and sauntered quietly along the Park, intending to leave it by Hyde Park corner gate, and proceed immediately to Lord Algernon's lodgings in the Albany.

The evening was soft and calm, and the peace and quiet that pervaded the almost solitary scene was in harmony with that tranquillity of mind which succeeds to a righteous determination. Edward looked around upon the trees throwing their long shadows over the grass, where the numerous herds of cattle were quietly browsing, and upwards to that sky, now all in a glow with the last beams of a setting sun — and thence his imagination travelled to the abode in a remote county which was his father's, and would sometime be his own — a home worthy of the charming girl — whose hand he still seemed to press, and whose faintly murmured "Yes" — and "Yes," and "Yes" — fell so sweetly upon his memory. Even for her — that fine — that noble — that almost princely residence, seemed a place fair enough.

Then he thought with fresh admiration of the honourable exertions of his father, which had secured such a possession for himself and his heirs, and which had entitled him, a mere sailor, to make pretension to

this beautiful child of the aristocracy and be received as an acceptable suitor. His affection for his father had always been very great — but now, his heart softened by the late scene with Lady Emma, and his appreciation of what Mr. Aubrey had done for him thus enhanced, it seemed as if he had never felt how much he loved him before.

And again he reflected with remorse upon the way in which he had of late trifled with his father's anxieties. He had felt they were exaggerated — but had he not overrated his own strength? and with the usual presumption of youth, suffered himself to regard his father's representations with a slight approach to contempt — as the over-cautious warnings of an old and worn-out man?

He now saw all the folly and ingratitude, of which he had been guilty — and whilst he rejoiced at his narrow escape, and at the good fortune which had given him the means of rescuing himself from his present unpleasant dilemma, he made the most serious resolution, henceforth and for ever, to renounce gaming in every one of its forms. He was at last become fully aware of its dangers to a character rash and impetuous as his own. In this mood, it was, that he at length found himself at Lord Algernon's door.

He expected to have found his friend at home, reposing after the fatigues of Ascot — but he was not there. His servant said he had gone out without dressing. It was probable that he was at his club.

Edward called first at the Junior United Service, with a faint, and but a faint, hope of finding Algernon. There he was not, however, — so, to the club in C. street Captain Aubrey most reluctantly turned his steps.

CHAPTER XVI.

Manlike is it to fall into sin,
Fiendlike is it to dwell therein.

LONGFELLOW.

FULL of his newly excited feelings of aversion and disgust, Captain Aubrey crossed the threshold of the club in C— street. He entered its small but beautifully adorned entrance hall, now lighted up by the large central lamp so as to display in perfection the variegated marbles and the imitation of tessellated pavement with which it was adorned.

He then glanced into the large lower room, but he scarcely hoped to find his friend there. The apartment was more crowded than usual, for many had returned from Ascot, rather inclined to dine, and drink hock and champagne, than to risk any additional money that night. Groups of young men were sitting round the different supper tables, discussing the irreproachable fare before them and the great topic of the day, with almost equal interest and avidity.

Loud debate was going on, regarding the payment of the bets upon the favourite. That she had been physicked seemed to be considered by some as past a doubt, whilst it appeared to be equally demonstrative to others that the potion had been perfectly innocent, and had been administered merely to affect the question of paying the bets in case of her losing the race.

Noisy were the arguments and great the doubts as to how the matter would be settled by the Jockey Club. But the majority seemed decidedly of opinion that the bets must be paid. Edward had, as we have seen, already settled this matter as regarded himself — so he listened to what was going on with little interest, and kept looking round in search of Lord Algernon.

At last he beheld him, sitting at a small table in a distant corner, supping by himself. So making his way through the excited throng, he went up to him.

He was struck by his appearance. The young man looked pale and jaded, his hair and dress were in disorder, and he was evidently fatigued in body, and vexed in mind.

Edward felt considerable repugnance to ask him for money at such a time — but duty must be done — that was the maxim of his life.

So he sat himself down upon a chair standing vacant by Lord Algernon, and saying, "My good fellow," arrested his attention, for he seemed so lost in his own thoughts that he appeared not to notice Captain Aubrey's approach.

He started and turned round, with an exclamation, and a half-muttered oath.

"Is it you?"

"Yes," said Edward. — "It is I, without doubt."

"I thought you had foresworn this wicked place," said the other, with something the least in the world like a sneer.

"So I have; I come here to-night merely in search of you."

"In search of me! — Well — and for what? I hope not as Mentor would seek the lost Telemachus, to recall me from the error of my ways, — because you might have spared your respectable limbs that fatigue, my venerable friend — inasmuch as I am as sick of *my* goddess as ever the young mooncalf could be of his Calypso. — I merely came here to-night because the cutlets and the wine are better, than elsewhere — and there is less danger of my meeting with people whom, in my present ferocious humour, I don't want to see."

"I am sorry you are in a ferocious humour," said Edward, endeavouring to hide his disagreeable feelings as best he might from himself and his friend, "for I am certainly one of those — at least, in my present character — whom men in their most angelic moods are not very apt to make welcome — in short, Algernon, I come in the form of a dun — I have lost five thousand pounds at Ascot to-day —"

Lord Algernon cast up his eyes.

"And the long and short of it is, I don't like to trouble my father just now, because I am sorry to say, he is very far from well —"

"And would be shocked — Eh?"

"And so, if you could give me a cheque for the five thousand pounds balance remaining in your hands of our almost infamous gains of the other night, why, I should be very much obliged to you."

"Not in the least" — gulping down a something — an oath perhaps, and with an air of cold pettishness which he strove to render disengaged and cordial — "the money is your own. Will you oblige me? — your hand is upon the bell; will you ring for

pen and paper, or shall we go to the library — oh, I forgot we are at C—'s, and have no library."

Edward would not put out his hand to ring — he could not. He felt as if Lord Algernon ought to have spared him that office.

"You won't — Here, bring pen, ink, and paper" — as a waiter passed by — "and let me have that cutlet as soon as you can, and an *omelette aux abricots*, and some of Mr. S—'s best hock. — This wine, tell him, is infamous."

Then he strove hard to recover his temper, and he did recover it, so far, at least, as to bring himself to say,

"I suppose you took my advice, and I am very sorry that I gave it — that's all. But you need not pay yet — Are you aware of that?"

"I have given my note of hand, which will be taken up early to-morrow morning."

"Who was the bet with?"

"A Mr. Stanhope."

"*That* rascal! How did you come across *him*? I never bet with him, 'cause he's not a gentleman."

The waiter returned, bringing the pen and paper, and Lord Algernon wrote a cheque upon his bankers.

Edward, filled with all sorts of uncomfortable feelings, had turned away whilst this was being done, and he did not observe the tremulous, shaking hand, or the contracted brow of the writer. Hurriedly the cheque was finished and signed, and then touching Captain Aubrey's elbow, Lord Algernon, with as careless an air as he could assume, said,

"What a brown study you are in! What's the matter with you? Take your money — there it is."

"But," said Edward, now sitting down at the table, the cheque in his hand, "tell me candidly whether this will be of any serious inconvenience to you, Algernon — in which case I will think of some other method of getting what I want, though, to tell truth, if that had been easy, I would not have troubled you."

"Oh! say no more about it — the money's your own."

"I hope," Edward began again, "that you were not so unlucky as I was at Ascot."

"Don't speak of it! — The sooner those things are forgotten the better. There are ways and means of making it up with fortune."

"But I trust, Algernon... Let me say a few words to you as friend to friend.... I have quarrelled with myself severely ever since that night when, in a fit of desperation, I first seized the dice, and was so preposterously lucky. I have been haunted with the idea that it was *my* success which tempted you to forsake whist for this more dangerous and ensnaring game. I have been wishing to speak to you upon the subject. It may seem very ridiculous in me to counsel one who knows the world a great deal better than I do; but do not go on break through this fatal habit, and at once. Above all, do not endeavour to repair your ill-luck in this dangerous manner — and if — if what I have asked for to-night will really inconvenience you Here!" — tearing the cheque in pieces as he spoke — "perish that a thousand times rather — perish all! — than tempt to a renewal of these perilous doings."

"Hum! hum! — ha! ha! Why, Edward, you only want a wig and lawn sleeves. Preach! — You preach

to *me*! Ha! ha! Why, it is the unfledged cockerel enlightening the king of the walk. My dear and most excellent callow Mentor, spare your pains — I'll take good care of myself, don't you fear; and yet" — and his eye, late so defying, softened a little — "you *are* a good fellow; but I'm sorry you tore up the paper, because I shall have the trouble of writing another; for harkye, Edward, if you don't want your money, don't come and ask me for it. I never allow any one to do that twice. So, so, here comes the cutlet, and here's your cheque" — writing another, and tossing it across the table — "and now let us set to work in good earnest. Waiter, another plate."

"Excuse me — I have no appetite to-night — I must be gone." —

"No appetite — Why, my dear fellow, I thought you had more spunk. — What! a first loss — and after such gains! — Well, I believe the first loss, like the first plunge, *will* try the nerves a bit. — It was so with me, if I recollect right — but it happened ages ago, when I was a slip of a lad. — Come, my fair novice, for I declare you look as white as Emma's hand — take heart of grace, and a glass or two of hock — all the banks have been shut these five hours, and you can't get your money to-night."

And so saying, he helped himself to the delicate cutlets before him, repeating — "Too hungry for manners" ... and began to eat voraciously, and drink bumper after bumper of the wine which stood before him.

Edward had risen from his chair at the first invitation to eat — but he did not go. — He stood there eyeing Lord Algernon wistfully, who on his part

seemed only intent upon devouring his cutlets — but there was a convulsive hurry about him as he did so — swallowing one large mouthful after another with greedy unnatural haste, that told of anything rather than the wholesome avidity for food which bespeaks a body exhausted, but a mind at ease.

He gulped down his dinner with as little real inclination for it as Edward himself — and in his face there was a strange expression of repressed agitation, and of a resolution to brave everything, united.

Edward stood irresolute, eyeing his friend, and holding the cheque still unfolded.

At last, laying his hand upon Lord Algernon's shoulder, and stooping down, he said —

“I am not going to take this money” —

Lord Algernon impatiently released his shoulder, and looking up with an air of haughty surprise into his friend's face, said —

“You forget yourself — I think you dunned me for it.”

“If that is the term you choose to use between you and me — be it so — yes, I confess I did *dun* you for it — but I have changed my mind, and will do without it.”

“But I have not changed *my* mind. — Say no more, and if you don't want any supper, please to let me finish my own. — Please to stand out of the sun, said the ragged philosopher from his tub. — Please to let me eat my victuals in peace, say I.”

And he bent his head again to his plate.

Still Edward lingered, unwilling, irresolute, till Lord Algernon turned at last impatiently round.

“I'll tell you what, Aubrey — If you don't please

to take yourself and that confounded scrap of paper away — there'll be a quarrel between you and me in no time."

Then Edward turned from the table, and slowly descended the steps, and slowly took his way home. His spirits were excessively depressed — dark forebodings of, he knew not what, came over him.

In vain he endeavoured to rally — to cheer himself by dwelling upon the happy prospects which had opened during the last few hours — upon the sweet innocent smile — the softly murmured "Yes" — the hand that had so very gently, and almost imperceptibly answered to his. — It would not do. As if in an evil dream, haggard spectres crowded round and obscured the lovely vision. — Algernon's face — so dark and ominous — the haggard, spectral countenances that haunt the gaming table! — desperate in their anguish, or ferocious in their joy! — The poor lad whom he had saved was there too — though that figure in some degree qualified his painful thoughts — but he never had felt more depressed during the whole course of his life than at this moment.

In this humour he made his way along the streets, where the carriages were flashing hastily by — where open windows and the sound of gay music told of the festivities going on within — one scene of splendid and joyful bustle.

Concealing what — for the most part?

Empty, or miserable hearts?

As soon as Captain Aubrey was gone, Lord Algernon pushed his plate impatiently away, swallowed two

more bumpers of wine, drew out his betting book, laid it upon the table, and, pulling the candle towards him, began to study the contents.

He sat there, his head resting upon his white, thin, almost skeleton hand, which was buried in the thick brown waves of his hair. Slowly, one after another, he looked over the pages, and as he did so, gradually his face grew paler and paler, and the cloud upon his brow deeper and darker. His very lips grew white over his set teeth, and his eyes were dry and stony as those of a fiend in torment.

Slowly he turned page after page — again and again went over the numbers inscribed there — at last he took out his small gold pencil and began to cast up the sums marked down upon the leaves before him. And then upon the fly leaf he reluctantly set down the amount of each column, and made up the sums in one.

The total! — There it lay.

He looked at it with a fixed eye, moving not a muscle; but his face was black as night.

All those bad passions which attend upon the gambler were working in direst force within him.

The lust of gain — covetousness — the love of selfish luxury — the pride and exultation of late success — now, by a reverse, changed to bitterness and gall. Fierce despair — impatience of defeat — a reckless desperation, terminating in a proud defiance of all that was prudent, wise, or even honourable; and a resolution, in spite of every consideration, to redeem his fortunes, or perish in the attempt.

He had lost all, and now that Edward had asked for his five thousand pounds, there was barely enough

left to satisfy the claims of this fatal betting-book. Enough there was, however, so that he could not even urge in defence of the conduct which followed, that he was driven to despair, and adopted it as the only means remaining to redeem his debts of honour — he had enough left to do that — but then, he would have remained penniless. He, who, not twenty-four hours before, had felt rich even beyond his own wants and wishes, extravagant as they were, was now a beggar, as he esteemed it, with only his pay in the world, and perhaps, a few tens of pounds remaining where so lately there had been tens of thousands — for such had been the result, incredible as it may seem, of his late astonishing run of luck.

To submit to this was impossible. His pride, his avarice — for who is so avaricious as the gambler and the spendthrift? — his love of pleasure, his love of extravagance, of liberty and independence, all disappointed, and in their place, what to be looked for but economy, and tradesmen's bills, and all the irritating troubles of want of money?

Endure this? — Impossible! He could not and he would not. He would try his luck again. — True he was bare of cash. — There might not remain enough to pay his stakes if he lost — but he should win — he always did win — he would be cautious — with care, and half his usual luck, he must assuredly win.

And so he silenced that voice of honour, which, though conscience had long been asleep, still faintly whispered within his breast. And slowly closing and clasping his book, examining the fastening with a daudling unnecessary minuteness — he at length rose from the table, and swallowing yet two other glasses

of wine, which finished his bottle, with a half reluctant step, he made his way to the hazard table.

They were playing *rouge et noir* in one part of the room, and he hesitated a moment, tempted to try his chance there. But then he remembered his late success at hazard, and a sort of presentiment, as he thought, impelled him to the fatal board — a sort of promise — an internal assurance of success — which in the present state of his spirits — with the superstition common to such trying moments in life, he was tempted to look upon as prophetic.

The box is in his hand, and he throws, and casts a hasty anxious glance at the figures — and as usual —

He has won —

The sum was not considerable — but what mattered that, in his present humour? It was the renewal of confidence in his own good fortune, that he wanted — This was the answer, as it seemed, and the confirmation of his best anticipations. — It was as if a heavy load was taken from his breast, his countenance assumed its usual expression, and drawing a chair — for in his agitation and anxiety he has remained standing — he sat down, prepared and resolved to make a night of it.

And now he throws once more, and for a larger stake, and wins — and now he plays double or quits, and wins again.

You should have watched that gambler's face — How all its pallid wretchedness, and its dark anxiety — its bitterness and blackness disappeared, to make way for a wild and terrible joy. A fiendish joy, we may well call it, as he glanced at the man with whom he was playing, and whose agitation was fearful to

behold. But a fierce and cruel brightness lighted up Lord Algernon's face, the red fiery colour rose to his cheek, till, by degrees, it assumed that peculiar satanic look, expression, and hue which belongs to men who lead a life such as this — an alternation of misery and pride — with a hard unpitying look he fixed his insolent eye upon his pale and wretched adversary.

"Double or quits?" The sum was now becoming very considerable.

The young man opposite hesitated, trembled, looked up to the ceiling with a sort of appealing despair, and muttered, in a hollow, stifled voice, "Done."

Lord Algernon threw —

"Sizes!"

And he sprang from his seat and shouted with exultation.

The young man reeled backwards, and covered his face with his hands.

He was about to retreat from the table, but a friend, who stood near, took hold of him by the elbow.

"Never say die. — In for a penny, in for a pound. — Try him once more, the luck must turn sooner or later."

"But I have lost all — all — all — all!"

"Double or quits — double or quits!" shouted Algernon.

Heated as he was he had forgotten his usual caution, and had been swallowing bumper upon bumper of wine.

"Double or quits!"

"Take him — take him," whispered the young

man's adviser, and the devil within his breast, added, "It will be but the same remedy — a pistol bullet — now, or then — what matters it? Take your chance for salvation."

Salvation! This man had possessed, in his childhood, a careful mother. Years and years it was since she had died, and he had been left to his own guidance; but some faint traces of her early teaching still lingered in his mind. Until this moment, however irregular his conduct, his career had been strictly honourable. He had wronged no man, had been, in the common phrase, only his own worst enemy, and now, trembling upon the edge of that eternity in which he shudderingly believed, yet was preparing to rush upon uncalled — the voice so low and plaintive spoke again.

No — he would not — it was the crisis of his fate — one throw might redeem all — but if he lost he had no means of payment.

"No," he said, and turned away — "I have not the money."

But now, there was a kind of bustle of great excitement around the table where Lord Algernon still sat, shouting forth his challenges, "Double or quits — double or quits."

"The odds are fearfully against him," said a regular old adventurer in this dreadful traffic, "I'll venture it!" — and he accepted the challenge.

There was a sudden lull.

Every eye was turned towards the table, where sat these two resolute men, eyeing one another with a sort of stern admiration of their mutual courage.

The attention of the young man, who had already

lost so much, was arrested, just as he was about to quit the room — he turned back, and with haggard countenance stood and watched the turn of fortune which might have been his own.

The eyes of the combatants are gleaming with unearthly fires, as with greedy, vulture expression, they fasten upon that small green field.

The fatal boxes strike the table —

Lord Algernon! —

He has fallen back in a sort of stupor, his eyes wide open, fixed and glaring, his clenched teeth visible between his white and parted lips.

He has lost! —

The old and practised gambler glanced at him, with a mingled expression of cool satisfaction and surprise.

“Untie his neckcloth,” was all he said, “and one of you fetch a glass of water and throw it into his face.”

“You should have taken my advice, Embury,” whispered the young man’s friend.

Embury stood there, still pale as death, his eyes fixed upon Algernon.

He looked into his friend’s face, then fixed his eyes again upon the dreadful spectacle before him.

“No, no!”

“You are right,” was the answer.

“Mother, — angel mother!” mentally ejaculated the young Embury to himself, “thanks, blessed mother!” — then, turning to his friend, with a face from which all despair had vanished, to be followed by the bright glow of courageous resolution. “Thank God I

have enough to pay all — and then, not a pistol — but Australia!”

They have untied his neck handkerchief, and have thrown water into his face, and gradually he has recovered sensation.

He opens a bewildered eye and looks round, whilst his adversary remains quietly seated at the table. Algernon had been so stunned that it was some few minutes before he recovered himself sufficiently to speak, but when that time came, this was what he did and said, with a look which spoke the desperate defiance of wrong or right, which was going on within him.

He laid his hand upon the box and said —

“Try it again.”

“No, your pardon,” replied the gentleman opposite with great coolness — “Forty thousand pounds is enough for me, for one night — but, certainly, Lord Algernon shall not be denied his revenge provided he can give me security that the needful eighty thousand, in case he lose, shall be forthcoming.”

Algernon turned pale, and his eye glared fiercely at the cool ironical face of his adversary.

“Do you mean to insult me?”

“Nothing in the world farther from my intentions. But, in truth, I am but a poor wretch — a mere dabbler in these matters — and eighty thousand pounds is a sum that it might rather inconvenience me to lose. — Though no doubt a mere trifle to your lordship — so I only intended to suggest, as a simple measure of prudence, that we should each of us cast a

bird's-eye view over the state of our affairs, before proceeding further."

Algernon felt choking — passionate — desperate — agonising to try his luck once more, and extricate himself from the fearful situation in which he stood; but, knowing it to be impossible to give the assurance demanded, he was obliged to relinquish the contest.

So, with a self-command worthy of a better cause, sternly compressing the tumultuous passions that were struggling for mastery within, he coldly said —

"After what has passed, as I make a point of only playing with gentlemen, I will have done for to-night."

And, with a calmness perfectly astonishing, he wrote his I O U, handed it to the well-pleased adversary, rose from the table, and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

Quoi! je pourrais descendre à ce lâche artifice . . .

Ceux de ma naissance doivent haïr la bassesse . . .

RODOGUNE.

ALGERNON walked straight down stairs, turned into the Coffee room, where he had left his hat, — put it on, pressed it firmly down upon his head, and took his cane from the corner in which he had placed it — doing all this with a calmness, which was only the result of the blank despair within.

He was just leaving the room with intent to quit the house, when he was arrested by young Embury. —

“I beg your pardon, my Lord, — but we have not settled our accounts together — my property is partly invested in the funds, partly in mortgage — It will take a little time to realise so as to redeem this —” and he handed him a paper.

A paper which conveyed to a stranger — a worthless stranger, all the property that he possessed in the world — Lost in the insane folly of an hour. And with it went his fair hopes of advancement in life — his tender aspirations after one dearly beloved and worthy to be beloved — all forfeited for this unaccountable madness.

It was more like a fearful dream than a reality.

He shook himself — he hoped to awaken. — He was no professed gambler, but his head already heated by the excitements of Ascot, he had taken too much wine, — his first losses had driven him almost

desperate, and in his agony hoping to extricate himself, he had risked and lost his all.

All but his honour — *that* he had not pledged.

"It will take a little time to realise this," he repeated, "but I can assure you upon my honour, that there is sufficient to redeem the bill. The first thing to-morrow morning I will be at my banker's, and arrange matters, so that your lordship shall have the money as soon as possible — In the mean while," observing now for the first time Lord Algernon's ghastly countenance, he said, "the bill will be negotiable, I believe."

Lord Algernon stood staring at him as if the words scarcely reached his ear.

The outward appearance of calmness which he had maintained since he had left the table, belonged rather to one stunned out of his sensibility, who moves and acts like an automaton, than to a man in the possession of his senses.

As the young man continued to speak, slowly his powers of attention seemed to be returning.

"I — I — understand — Thank you, it will do quite well — I have no doubt . . . not the least doubt in the world — Pardon me, I did not mean to express any — Twenty-five thousand pounds — eh!" and he looked at the paper, "All right — good night, Sir."

And he was about to depart, leaving the bill in young Embury's hands.

But the young man caught him by the arm as he was going away.

"Excuse me again," he said, "but you must take this, if you please."

He now perceived and with great compassion, the

state in which Lord Algernon was. The man in general regarded as so undaunted, so defiant of every risk, danger, and difficulty! and Embury felt a mixture of pity and something like contempt when he found him, at this crisis, more overcome than he had been himself.

But he understood not the difference of the two cases. *He* was himself a ruined man, but his honour was safe. — He was saved — though as by fire. He was free, though penniless. Every obligation would be acquitted. True, hardship, hard work, and hard struggles lay before him, but he was the slave of sin no longer, the shackles had fallen from his hands; at this heavy price he had purchased his deliverance!

But the wretched man on whom he gazed was plunged, by this last reverse of fortune, into a gulph of horrors, a sea of shame and dishonour, without hope or end.

No one suspected the whole state of the case. No one, but his now most miserable son, was acquainted with the true position in which the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux stood.

It is not necessary to enter into a detail of the circumstances of a deeply embarrassed man — embarrassed to an almost limitless extent by that thoughtless expenditure without system, order, or calculation, which buries the individual in debt, though he may not have been guilty of any excessive vice or extravagance — the mere consequence of that sort of wastefulness and slackness of hand which seems to infatuate men never in the habit of attending properly to the state of their affairs, and which has sapped, and finally overthrown, many a fair and prosperous fortune.

Moreover, Lord Hurstmonceaux was an Irishman, and his property had been previously injured by the extravagance of the generations which preceded him, and had descended to him loaded with mortgages, annuities, and liabilities, which put him very much at the mercy of his lawyers. Indolent, self-indulgent, and careless, had been those who went before him, and he was little fitted to unravel the complicated web of embarrassments thus entailed. His affairs went on from bad to worse. He lived upon expedients. The ingenuity of his men of business was racked to find money for present expenses, but money they, some way or other, unfortunately contrived to find; so that their principal was unchecked in his neglect of calculation, plan, and punctuality, whilst his ambitious lady indulged her passion for display — or rather, for settling her daughters, and advancing her sons, which she, assuming to be an unquestionable authority as a woman who knew the world — and who was universally reckoned a most excellent manager, asserted, and probably believed, was only to be effected in this way.

There was a large family of children.

Mostly young things, yet in the school-room, or nursery. The eldest son was imbecile, and therefore Lord Algernon had assumed to himself the privileges and influence, which, as a second brother, he could not in any other case have claimed; and he had allowed himself, and been indulged, by his too fond mother in, expenses which neither accorded with his profession as a naval man, nor with his position in society — and less than all, with the real state of his father's affairs.

This sketch is necessary to account for the dilemma in which he found himself, and which increased in horror the more he considered it.

During the interval which had elapsed since he had given his note-of-hand for the enormous sum he had lost, his thoughts had been hurrying over the desolate, hopeless prospect which surrounded him. Not one ray of comfort to be discerned. No quarter from whence aid could be looked for. No resource of any description to be found.

And above stairs — a few steps from him, was a man holding papers which he, in the pride and haughtiness of his spirit, had signed and presented, — without deigning to cast a thought as to the means of taking them up.

Embury's note was, however, now in his hand.

Half his obligations were thereby discharged, but the remainder! — the remainder! — fifteen thousand pounds! — and his father could not even furnish him with one.

It was but the day before, that, conversing with his mother, she had told him of the terrible confusion of their affairs, and of the difficulty she had in finding money or credit, to enable her to settle the bills on account of her recent splendid entertainment, which she declared it had been absolutely necessary to give for darling Emma's sake.

How he got out of the Club House — how he stumbled down the steps into the street — how he pursued his way like some blinded animal hurrying straight onwards he knew not whither — he never afterwards could recollect. It was not until he had

walked a considerable way that his senses seemed to return.

He lifted up his eyes, and found that he had wandered to a great distance from the proper course to his lodgings, and as he looked around, he saw that the night was already waning — the lights of the street lamps were paling in their sockets, and the cold white dawn faintly streaked the horizon.

All around him was silent and still as the grave — that great, busy, multitudinous city was hushed in repose. Only the distant rumble of a few carts coming up from the country, — and the clocks which every now and then told off the hour, could be heard.

It is a time which breathes tranquillity, and which calms and soothes the fevered pulses of the night watcher, — as the fresh cool air of that hour blows in gentle currents down each street.

But there was no tranquillity for him.

No quiet could soothe the irritation of his nerves, or cool his burning brow. His lips were deadly pale, as were his cheeks, except that a streak of red might be seen across them — that deep red burning bar, which looks like the mark upon Cain.

What was to be done? — How? — Where? What?

He turns down a street and lo! he is upon the iron bridge which crosses the Thames below Blackfriars, and early as is the hour, wherries with luggage and passengers, — trunks, hat-boxes, and carpet-bags, and men attired as for travelling, are shooting onwards down the river. — A man in an empty wherry hails him, as there he stands, and looks over the balustrade. The steamer for Antwerp, the Apollonia,

is to sail, at half-past five that morning — this notice he now sees staring him in the face in enormous letters upon a large white paper fixed up against the wall before him, and which he had not observed before.

Shall he descend the stairs, take his place in the wherry, and escape? The thought was too tempting to be resisted! He hailed the boatman in his turn, and almost before he knew where he was, he is there upon the bosom of the Thames, making his way due eastward.

The lulling motion of the wherry rather inclined him to sleep than to reflect. The first sensation after the fierce paroxysm of the preceding hours was of a dull and drowsy sense of repose. He made no effort to resist it — but fairly worn out, body and mind, yielded to the influence, and lost himself altogether, as the phrase is, until he was awakened by the prow of the wherry striking against the side of the black enormous mass which loomed above him, and he found himself looking up at the ladder, by which numerous passengers, who had come down the river, were ascending to the deck of the *Apollonia*.

"Here we are, Sir," said the waterman, "if so be that it is the *Apollonia* that we are a coming for — two shillings, if you please, is my fare — thank ye, Sir" — as Algernon flung him half-a-crown — "a fresh breeze and right down river, and promising for a fair sky — I wish you a pleasant voyage — Anything more that I can do for you, Sir?"

No answer — and Lord Algernon stands upon the deck.

He found himself surrounded by busy seamen,

rushing up and down, and by passengers pushing about for seats, and calling for their luggage, and taking leave of friends, and providing for the comfort of children. The benches were already filled with women, in horrid ugly bonnets and cloaks, such as the more ordinary English woman loves to array herself in upon a voyage, and with men in rough coats and wide-awakes, fastened with a ribbon to the button-hole. A few well-dressed, aristocratical-looking ladies herded together upon a side bench, and their smartly attired lady's maids, and their respectable head nurses sat at a little distance, striving to keep the children from scampering all over the ship, whilst the husbands and brothers, men to whom time is of value, and punctuality, in their inferiors at least, an indispensable, were collected round the captain arguing and remonstrating.

"Half-past-five," it was the hour announced in every advertisement, whether in 'Times,' 'Morning Herald,' or 'Morning Post,' and the vessel is not to sail until half-past-eleven.

The cause of this delay is immaterial to our story — it is with the effect of it that we have alone to do.

Lord Algernon had ascended the ladder and planted his feet upon the deck before he well knew where he was or what he was about.

He was still dizzy with the sort of dog sleep into which he had fallen, and it was not till the fresh wind which blew into his face had played some time upon his temples, that the fevered brain began to cool, and the confusion of his thoughts to subside.

And then he became aware of where he was, and sensible to external influences once more, and his eye glanced round upon the scene before him. He scarcely deigned to observe the mob of ordinary passengers, with whom he had nothing in common; but he looked towards that little party of apparently high-bred women who were sitting upon the bench upon the further side of the vessel, and upon the figures of one or two well-dressed and fashionable-looking men, who were hovering around them, and that sight, as by magic, dissolved the world of dreams, and restored him to the realities of society. Anxious not to be seen, his first impulse was to turn steerage-way, and go to the head of the vessel, where there were none but sailors about; so, passing over cables and between heaps of various sorts of merchandise and luggage, he made his way to a coil of ropes, and upon it, almost at the very end of the deck, he sat down.

And he looked out upon the blue heavens, and upon the rolling river, and upon the vast city, which lay before and around him, and then he rested his cheek upon his hand, and thought upon what he was about to do.

Fly from his country a defaulter — his debts of honour unpaid. That was what he was going to do, and, as a consequence, forfeit his position in society, his place in his profession — every advantage he possessed in life, and henceforth become a vagabond upon the earth, ashamed to show his face among honourable men.

Anything more disgraceful than the conduct he meditated could scarcely be. Far better would it have been to have conquered the proud spirit within — to

have humbled himself under the distress into which his own folly had brought him — confess his difficulties to the man who had won his money, implore his patience and ask for time.

But he was not the man capable of making reparation for wrong by submission to duty. He was not in the habit of thinking what was right, only of what was expedient — perhaps only, of what was easiest to be done. To confess that he staked advisedly what he knew he was unable to pay, was a humiliation to which his haughty spirit found it impossible to submit — anything rather than that, said the mocking fiend within.

Yet to fly — to be branded as a defaulter! — was not that the worst of all?

To be disgraced for ever, and banished for life from society! — condemned to find companionship with the infamous alone!

Infamous like himself!

Equally insupportable!

It was, perhaps, about an hour that he sat upon the coil of rope, lost in thought, his hand covering his eyes.

At length he seemed to have taken his resolution. He rose with the air of a man who has discovered some expedient to relieve him from the utmost embarrassment, and walking towards the waist of the vessel, he asked the engineer when she was really to start —

“Because,” said he, “I have some business which I think will be best completed before I leave Eng-

land; and it will take me about an hour. Shall I have time?"

The engineer looked at his watch. Eight o'clock.

"Abundance of time, Sir. We shall not be under weigh until half-past eleven."

Algernon immediately quitted the deck, and making his way rather slowly through the crowd which was gathered upon the quay, like a man who is in no hurry to effect that which he is about to undertake, he turned up one of those narrow streets which lead citywards from the Thames, and entered the first tavern that presented itself.

He asked for a private room, pen, ink, and paper.

The people enquired whether he would not have some breakfast.

He refused — but called for a glass of water.

This he drank, and then sat down and leaned his elbows upon the table, and his head upon his hands, till the pen, ink, and paper were brought.

"Is this the best paper you have? It is as transparent as glass. — Can you get me no better covers than these?"

"Hard by at the stationer's, Sir."

"Fetch some, do you hear? and the best envelopes they have."

And whilst the boy went on his errand, Algernon took a sheet of the paper which lay before him, and wrote a long, hurried, scrawling, vehement letter, which he folded, placed in the envelope, fastened and stamped.

By this time the boy had returned with the better paper, which he had asked for, and with larger and thicker envelopes.

"Sealing wax and a candle."

"Yes, Sir."

The boy retired to fetch them.

Then Algernon took out of his side pocket the paper signed by Embury, looked at it, and folded it, then he wrote with considerable care and hesitation upon a half note sheet, which he tore off, and finally he wrote rapidly upon another sheet. — All these papers, including the bill from Embury, he folded together and enclosed in the envelope, which he sealed with his own arms, and then he took up his hat, and inquired whether he could post a letter at Margate, — where he understood that the steamer usually stopped to take up passengers, — being answered in the affirmative, he put the letters which he had written into his pocket, and they were subsequently posted at Margate.

And consequently did not, as he calculated, arrive in town until the evening of that day, at an hour when all the banking houses would be shut.

After having finished his writing, he looked at his watch, and finding there was abundance of time to spare, he strolled a little further on, and made a few necessary purchases, among others of a carpet bag and dressing box.

Without a dressing box — *necessaire* as it was called in those days, you remember it was impossible for Marie Antoinette to travel, even at the crisis of her fate — the escape to Verdun.

At a quarter before eleven, Lord Algernon returned to the Apollonia, and no longer seeking the obscurity of the steerage, went forwards towards the

stern of the vessel, and fell into conversation with the man at the wheel.

He looked quite composed now, and his countenance had assumed its usual expression, only that there was wanting a certain carelessness and gaiety usually to be found there. He certainly looked grave, — but he seemed satisfied with what he had been doing, and his satisfaction appeared rather to increase than diminish, as time passed on.

The hour for departure was now arrived, the huge paddle wheels began to play, — and the vast, black hull to plough onwards, plunging heavily through the waters.

The sun shone brightly by this time, and the day promised to be beautiful. The soft and small white clouds were fleeting slowly before the pleasant breeze, over the blue, blue sky. And the sun cast its bright gleams, gilding the shores, and whitening the sails of crowds of vessels, which, with their canvas all spread, were making their way down the river.

The scene was charming, as such scenes ever are, — with the shifting groups — the shining waters — the sun now brightly gleaming, now crossed by a coursing cloud, and casting the whole into momentary shadow.

The influences of this delightful morning seemed to pervade the whole of the little society assembled upon deck. People sat upon the different benches, eyeing the water, or gazing upwards at the sky, enjoying the delicious freshness of the air, after the heavy atmosphere of the great town. The little party of ladies and gentlemen, who have been before mentioned, continued together; some sitting upon cushions

on the deck, some on camp stools, some upon the side benches leaning over the gangway, and watching the little rippling waves as they coursed gaily along.

Some of the party were reading, others working, all were chatting very gaily and pleasantly, as it seemed. Children were sitting upon the deck, or running about in the midst of them —

It had the air of a thoroughly comfortable party, composed of what you would call very nice people — and Lord Algernon was soon attracted to them. The agitation of the preceding hours appeared to have subsided, and he watched them for some time. At last he found himself drawing near to the group, and after a boat had carried his letters to Margate, and the vessel began to approach the open sea, he fell into conversation with one of the gentlemen. When the hour for luncheon arrived, he handed down one of the ladies, and soon was in high talk with a very pleasant, chatty, well-bred girl. The party soon made out who he was, and cordially rejoiced in his company; whilst he reflected upon the plan he had adopted, and felt very glad that he had not banished himself from society for ever.

And so —

He made, after all, an agreeable voyage to Antwerp.

CHAPTER XVIII.

There is confusion worse than death,
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
Long labour unto aged breath —
Sore task to hearts worn out with many wars.

TENNYSON.

MR AUBREY sits in his dressing-room.

This dressing-room opens out of a large, airy, and most comfortable bed-room — but it is in itself anything but a comfortable-looking place — according to modern ideas of comfort.

It reminds me of that never-to-be-forgotten dressing-room of the most celebrated Englishman of our age — The Great Duke —

Who did not go to see that dressing-room? — The room which revealed, more than a thousand words could have done, the true character of the man.

The earnest, business-like reality, and simple habits of one endowed with genius so eminent for the conduct of actual life — for dealing with *facts*. — With things as they are — and not things as we fancy them, or would have them to be. — How pregnant was that scene! — How expressive of the direct and straight-forward nature of its master! — He had no time for the encumbrances of luxury. — The unavoidable litter of life was suffered to fall aside and accumulate unheeded. Leisure seemed wanted to select, to arrange, to clear away. There, stood his plain and half-worn out scarlet arm-chair —

and with such another just opposite, to be occupied by any one with whom he wanted to converse. — The only luxury to be found was the plain unadorned folding screen, which sheltered him from too much light or air. What a contrast to a certain screen elaborately ornamented by the persevering labours of Brummel, which I once saw: so tastefully covered with pictures and landscapes, and fruit, and leaves, and flowers! the simple labour of half a useless existence.

What an air of business there was in that great, heavy, ugly writing table; covered with heaps of things, no longer in use, but all once of use! Books and portfolios, and pamphlets, and maps, and parliamentary papers — the rubbish of a vigorous life.

And then the untied parcels, here and there, just left as death had surprised him! — surprised him at his eighty years as it surprises us all, cutting us short in the midst of our hopes, our expectations, our labours — severing us at one stroke from that tomorrow which we shall never see.

Happy the man who is found labouring —

But happier far the one who is found watching.

Mr. Aubrey, then, is sitting in a dressing room, in its character of business something resembling the one I have faintly endeavoured to describe, though wanting its simplicity, being indeed loaded with wealth and luxury.

For men who have recently made very large fortunes by commerce, are usually impatient to make a show of their money, and, moreover, they have an

odd sort of conscientiousness as regards the spending it — a feeling, I may say, common to respectable Englishmen. They feel ashamed of the cheap, as if they were lending themselves to a deception — every thing they buy must be *good* — must be, as far as circumstances will admit — of the very best of its kind that it is possible to procure without regard to cost.

Much unnecessary expense is in that way no doubt incurred, and it is this idea of respectability more or less pervading all classes, which probably adds materially to the expense of English living.

What cannot be thoroughly well done, it is thought ought not to be attempted at all.

It is different with our continental neighbours, and in consequence they seem to enjoy life much more than we do — but the feeling when not pushed to extreme is noble and good. And it may be questioned whether the sentiment, though frequently exaggerated, has not its foundation in something lofty and truthful, which renders home-spun John Bull a more genuine article, than his brilliant rivals.

But enough of this.

Mr. Aubrey's dressing room bore evidence that it had been fitted up with something of this feeling. There was not much display, — but no expense had been spared.

The curtains of a dark gloomy colour were of the thickest and finest cloth, with deep massive silken fringes of the same grave hue, and the cornice was very richly and elaborately carved, but in so darkly-coloured a wood, that all the fine workmanship was almost lost in that shady room.

The carpet and the hearth rug of the richest pile were equally expensive in their substance, and equally modest and subdued in their colour. So were the book-shelves, which occupied two sides of the room. They were formed of the most costly wood, — yet, save the carving of the handsome cornices, perfectly plain and surmounted with a few casts and vases, precious specimens of art, but all of the same sober character.

A large table stood in the centre of the room. Its finely inlaid sides and top being almost perfectly obscured to sight, — by heaps and heaps of papers lying at top — whilst portfolios containing more and more papers were leaning against the sides. Massive chairs, covered with velvet of the same dark hue as the curtains, and numerous tables, loaded as was the centre one — completed the furnishing of the room. Over the chimney of which, in lieu of mirror, hung a gloomy picture, of the Massacre of the Innocents, from the pencil of Zurbaran.

Such was the character of the apartment, symbolical of the character of the master.

Mr. Aubrey was, as I before said, of a stern, cold nature — a man of intellect, but of that kind of intellect which is occupied with facts — the solid and tangible aspect of things where imagination and fancy have little play and the real business of life is everything.

To a superficial observer it seemed as if he altogether wanted imagination — but unknown to himself, he possessed that faculty in a considerable degree; but it had rarely been indulged, was sedulously kept down, and nothing would have surprised Mr.

Aubrey more than to be supposed capable of being influenced by it.

Little did he suspect how much imagination had to do with those wide and extended views of ambition which had been the ruling impulse of his life.

How much he was indebted to it for that power almost of divination into the probable effect of circumstances, which had been the making of his fortune — for that well-ordered and splendid plan of life, which had elevated him to so high a position in society. —

Above all, he was unaware how large a part imagination ill directed had been suffered to assume in the guidance of his affections, rendering one of such unblemished rectitude as regarded matters of business, — the partial and unjust parent he had suffered himself to become. This same imagination it was, which unrestrained, had been allowed to exaggerate with false colouring the good promise, which really was held forth by the one child, — and to deepen the shadows which darkened the character of the other; until under influences such as these, to which he never suspected himself of yielding, Mr. Aubrey was in these matters led as far astray as it was possible for the most susceptible of poetic temperaments to have been.

And there he now sits in his ponderous arm-chair — his feet, wrapped in flannel, resting upon a velvet footstool — his forehead shaded by a velvet cap, which partially covers his as yet scarcely silvered hair, his face pale, and his eye dimmed with sickness. — He seems deeply meditating.

His meditations are partly anxious, but for the most part pleasing. The image of his favourite son occupies, as usual, his thoughts — he is dwelling with

satisfaction upon the prospect of the projected marriage, and the high, aristocratical family, with which he is about to be connected. Some little drawback to his agreeable contemplations arises, however, from the recollection of certain rather unpleasant rumours which have reached him with respect to the state of the Marquis's affairs. But the anxiety thus occasioned is not very great. He knows there is an immense landed property entailed upon the next heir — so that the embarrassments of the present man might be looked upon as individual, and as in no way tending to impair the stability of the house, with which he is going to be allied.

As regarded the beautiful girl herself, it was plain no money was to be expected with her — but to that Mr. Aubrey was indifferent — and, as I have had occasion to observe before, it is astonishing how much the possession of personal beauty counts for in these wedding calculations. Beauty may be fleeting, and it may be vain, but in the affairs of the great world it seems to be reckoned a more solid and tangible advantage, than the finest mental and moral qualities united, that a woman can possess. For so it is — what can be seen has its superiority unquestioned, so counts far before those higher and more excellent gifts which belong to the region of the *unseen*.

Lady Emma will not bring a shilling — of that Mr. Aubrey feels sure. The hope that no money will be asked for must, he understands well enough, be the reason for the inclination shown by both noble parents for the match.

In every respect, save that of money, that beautiful child of fashion had a right to look far higher than to

the son of an East India director, however wealthy — but the above consideration altered the case — and it was with no little pride that he felt himself to be standing in a position of more than equality with the long-descended man of title.

The rich and independent man will always look down upon the poor and embarrassed man, be that man peer, king, or kaiser.

With an injustice, for which, indeed there is not the possibility of furnishing an excuse, this father of two sons was, at this identical moment, according to that love of perfecting his plans, of making things square, as he called it, which was the besetting sin of his life, engaged in considering how much of the portion, once intended to be set apart for his second son, under the supposition that his eldest might, as a matter of course, look to marry some young lady, with her from twenty to fifty thousand pounds — how much, I say, of this portion, which he had mentally reserved for William, might be diminished, so as to cover the deficiency as regarded Edward.

For, certainly, if Edward married the portionless daughter of a nobleman, something must be done to compensate the said deficiency, or he might not find himself that wealthy, powerful head of a house which his father had always intended he should be.

A larger provision for his younger children must be made, or the estate, it was plain, might eventually be hampered and embarrassed.

His own younger son would be plentifully provided for with two-thirds or half of what had been originally intended; a large portion compared with what his

son's sons, Edward's younger children, supposing there were a good many of them, would enjoy.

It matters not to specify exactly how great the sacrifice was that Mr. Aubrey was preparing to make, as respected his second son's expectations, but that he was, at this identical moment of time, engaged in considering and calculating that very subject, I can take upon myself to affirm.

When —

The door opened and a servant appeared. —

Oh fate! — oh providence! — oh world! — changing — changing world!

Vast events, linked by such minute, almost invisible, chains! — Small — small door — opening to such a new, wide, awfully changed perspective!

A letter — an entrance unlooked for — a pebble stone in a street — such are the insignificant title pages to that Sybil's book, altogether unthought of and astounding, which alters the world's history.

The door opened, and a servant entered.

It was only John, the under footman, in his morning undress livery, and with his unmeaning foolish face, that presented himself; he only uttered a few simple words.

Mr. Vincent, from the bank of A. B. C. D., and Co., asked to speak with Mr. Aubrey, for a few moments, if he was disengaged.

A very common occurrence this, for the business carried on between Mr. Aubrey and these, his confidential bankers, was extended and complicated.

A very common occurrence this.

Mr. Aubrey merely said —

"Beg Mr. Vincent to be so good as to step up."
And awaited his entrance with perfect composure.

The head clerk of the firm of Messrs. A. B. C. D., and Co., was a pale, thin, intelligent-looking man, bearing, upon a face of great regularity of feature, an unmistakeable expression of the right and the pure and the true, mingled with great calmness and self-possession.

Such, at least, was the usual character of that interesting countenance, but now the calmness was no longer there, the self-possession was changed into a strange nervousness, and a slight hectic colour was upon the usually pale cheek.

"Pray take a chair, Mr. Vincent," said the Indian director to the banker's clerk — "Excuse me, you see how I am crippled." Mr. Vincent bowed, and seated himself close by the large table upon which Mr. Aubrey's left arm was leaning — and he too, rested his hand upon the table, and stooped a little forward, as if in act to speak in a low and confidential manner.

But he spoke not.
Something seemed greatly to embarrass him. It appeared as if he wanted words to begin.

At last, still silent, he put his hand into his side pocket, and drew out thence the memorandum-book in which he was accustomed to carry his papers.

"Well, Sir," said Mr. Aubrey with some dignity.
He now observed something unusual about Mr. Vincent, though betrayed by such slight indications.

"Well, Sir?"

"Mr. Aubrey — Sir — The gentlemen of the house have requested me to call upon you — with regard to a somewhat — a somewhat — extra — unusual business — as relates to your dealings with them —"

"My dealings, Sir! — What can you mean?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Aubrey — that is not perhaps the proper term to use — but I am hurried and nervous — I must beg of you to excuse me, if I do not express myself with propriety."

Mr. Vincent paused a little, as if considering with himself — then, stooping still forwarder, so as to approach more nearly to Mr. Aubrey's ear, he said, —

"Mr. Aubrey has been always so considerate, so more than considerate as regards our house — — that the transaction of this morning — fills the gentlemen of the firm with a sentiment of pain and surprise — not to say — doubt — yet — that — that must be impossible! — I beg your pardon ... but ..."

"Sir," said Mr. Aubrey, with grave astonishment, "what *can* you be driving at. I should hope there has been nothing in my transactions as regards your house, either during the present week, or any week whatsoever preceding it, which can be calculated to arouse feelings of pain and surprise in any man. — Doubt! — I am at a loss to conceive what *that* word can mean, as applied to me?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir — I beg your pardon sincerely — no offence, I assure you, is or can be intended — but in a matter so altogether at vari-

ance with Mr. Aubrey's usual habits of proceeding, — to your kind and considerate attention as regards us — the gentlemen of the house think it best”

“Pray, Sir, let us come to the gist of the matter at once,” Mr. Aubrey said rather impatiently. — “All these preliminaries confound me, — I am totally at a loss to conceive what you can be driving at.”

The only answer Mr. Vincent made to this speech, was to open his pocket-book and present a cheque — or rather a piece of note paper, written over in the form of a cheque — and for fifteen thousand pounds. It was signed by Mr. Aubrey, and endorsed at the back — Edward Aubrey, R. N., — in Captain Aubrey's somewhat stiff and copy-like-looking hand.

The first exclamation of Mr. Aubrey was one of indignant surprise. But, as the banker's clerk, with a face from which all colour had now departed, and a trembling hand, pointed to the endorsement — the unhappy father turned deadly pale and sank back in his chair.

So he remained for a short period of time. Yet it was astonishing how rapidly this man, prompt in emergency and accustomed throughout the course of his life to deal with the most astounding changes and surprises, came to himself and recovered his power of thought and action.

Raising himself upright from the cushions on which he had sunk back, — he said, composedly — “It is all right — the cheque, I presume, has been duly honoured. Did you not receive my advice of it?”

“Not a syllable of advice,” answered the clerk,

eyeing Mr. Aubrey with extreme astonishment, forgetting all ordinary formalities in his extasy of surprise,—

“Then you *really* drew the cheque?”

“Sir!” — said Mr. Aubrey.

That one little monosyllable so spoken was enough — both men were at once in their relative places again. —

After a short pause Mr. Aubrey thus proceeded — speaking with calmness, though with some little apparent difficulty, and his cheek the colour of death.

“I am sorry no advice of this reached you — but you see how I am situated — dependent upon the attention of others, the letter of advice has, I see, not been delivered, and my — my son’s ignorance of business I hope this has been no inconvenience, — the wealth and stability of your house assure me of that, — but I am sorry sorry it should have happened so. When was the bill presented?”

“About an hour ago. The cheque was not crossed, you see — and though the signature at the bottom of the cheque”

“My hand-writing has a good deal altered in consequence of my illness,” observed Mr. Aubrey.

“Although yet the endorsement rendered it Still the circumstances of the case were so unusual, that Mr. A., the partner at that time in the house, begged the gentleman who presented it — a somewhat too well known character, I believe — to sit down whilst I made the best of my way to you to ascertain whether the paper ought to be honoured or not.”

“A somewhat too well known character — the presenter of the cheque!

"Who, and what is he?"

"A Mr. Crawley."

"Crawley: — I don't recollect hearing that name before."

"Possibly not, Sir, — most likely not, — yet he is a man but too well known."

"As how?" asked Mr. Aubrey.

And the arm which rested upon the writing table began to twitch and tremble.

"Mr. Crawley is a man but too well known in certain circles of this great town."

"As what? As what?"

"As a professed and most successful gambler," Mr. Vincent said, lowering his voice.

There was a low stifled groan in answer — that was all.

Then —

"You will please to direct that the cheque shall be honoured — It is all right —"

The last sentence added as if he were choking.

Presently —

"I think my actual balance in your hands is large enough to cover it — if not, accommodate me thus far — the needful shall be paid in to-morrow."

The banker's clerk remained sitting there, as if stupefied with surprise, literally nailed to his chair.

"Good morning, Sir," began Mr. Aubrey, as if desiring to end the conference.

It was all he could utter; and, it was with the greatest effort that he spoke at all, — and it cost him a thousand times greater effort to maintain even the appearance of composure.

"Good morning, Sir."

And Mr. Vincent was compelled to rise. — He took his leave, without saying a word more.

Mr. Vincent returned to the bank of Messrs. A. B. C. and D., and entered the sitting room where two of the partners stood engaged in talking over this most disagreeable affair, as it appeared to them.

In fact they had, neither of them, the least doubt that the cheque was forged; and they anticipated a thousand unpleasant consequences as likely to ensue from the transaction.

As regarded the endorsement upon the back, there was a difference of opinion. — One of the partners affirming that it was certainly the hand of Captain Aubrey, to which indeed it bore the closest resemblance — the other doubting it.

Mr. Crawley had been requested to give the name of the gentleman from whom he had received the cheque; but this he politely refused at present to do, saying, and with appearance of reason enough, that unless the cheque were dishonoured by Mr. Aubrey, he saw no necessity for further inquiry as to the matter.

Meantime, apparently at his ease, he patiently awaited the result of the appeal to the father.

The cheque was forged, or it was not. He had not himself much doubt, that forged it was, and by Captain Aubrey.

He had received it in payment from Lord Algernon — under the same cover with Mr. Embury's cheque, and he doubted not that it had been accepted by the young nobleman under similar circumstances.

It was rumoured that Captain Aubrey had lost a very large sum at Ascot, and this had doubtless been his means of payment.

After all, it was possible, that the rich and indulgent father might have given his son the money; but upon the worst supposition, namely, that the paper was not strictly regular, and that the young man had made unjustifiable use of his father's name, Mr. Crawley felt himself equally safe. Mr. Aubrey might have refused to pay his son's gambling debts; but, rather than expose him to the fearful consequences of a forgery, he would undoubtedly honour the cheque at once.

So Mr. Crawley felt himself perfectly comfortable as regarded his own part of the affair; and walked up and down with his hands in the pockets of his short, square frock coat, examining the engravings upon the walls of the back parlour in which he had been invited to wait, with an air of the utmost tranquillity.

Little elated with his winnings was he. He never thought of realising, but was going to fling the whole again into fortune's wheel, to be at some imaginary time drawn out for good. And so, as he sauntered up and down appearing to be examining the prints, which after all he never saw, he whistled a low whistle, that was scarcely a tune.

At last the door opened, the cashier appeared, — and took his receipt for fifteen thousand pounds sterling — paid in ten notes of one thousand — and ten of five hundred pounds.

CHAPTER XIX.

A poor blind Sampson
Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel.

LONGFELLOW.

MR. VINCENT had departed, —

Mr. Aubrey sat perfectly still for a considerable time. Not one single muscle of his body stirred, as he rested leaning back upon the cushions of his chair. Save some very slight twitches in the face, he was perfectly motionless.

Such was the manner in which this man, so well experienced in life, had habituated himself to subdue and master any extraordinary emotion — for his temperament was nervous, though his frame was so firmly knit — and the body responded fearfully to mental impressions, whatever the heart might do. His nerves he knew well would, upon occasions such as this, tremble and prove treacherous unless controlled by a strong will — and his first effort was always directed towards subduing them, and becoming master of himself again.

So thus he remained quite still until the agony had somewhat abated. Then he stretched forth his hand and pulled the bellrope, which was fastened to his chair.

And John, in his undress livery and with his foolish unmeaning face, again appeared.

“Bring me a glass of warm water” — which was in due time brought.

"Give me that bottle."

"Blockhead! The one on the right hand there."

And this was the only slight sign of impatience which appeared. Mr. Aubrey poured out some of the sol volatile — his hand shook so much whilst doing so that he could scarcely effect the little operation. He completed it, however, swallowed the draught, and then inquired —

"Is Captain Aubrey within? — Ask him to have the goodness to step up to me."

The servant returned in a few minutes with —
"Captain Aubrey is out, Sir."

"Out! When is he expected to come in? — Desire his servant to let him know as soon as he returns that I wish to speak with him immediately."

"He is not expected to return, I believe, Sir. His servant went out with him late yesterday evening, he had his carpet bag with him."

"I wish to speak to Saunderson."

"Saunderson is not come back, Sir, — there was some talk in the servant's hall of the Captain being gone abroad."

"Send Gregson up to me, — and leave the room, Sir, if you please — what do you stand staring for there?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir, — I thought you looked so ill, — shall I"

"What business is it of yours, you rascal, how I look? Do you hear? — Send Gregson immediately to me."

And the poor terrified footman sneaked out of the room.

The wretched father remained alone.

His two thin withered hands were clasped together — his head thrown back — his eyes uplifted.

Not to seek help and succour from above, poor man! — that was far from him at the moment, — that casting up of the eyes in his agony is instinctive — a mute appeal of nature, as it would seem, to the author of nature! Animals cast up their eyes when about to expire.

“Gone! — Gone abroad!”

“Well might he fly. Well might he seek refuge where all dishonourable scoundrels seek refuge. Well might he dread to meet his father’s face — that father so ungratefully, so cruelly treated.”

The door opened, and Gregson appeared.

An old, grey-headed, confidential servant was he, — one of those rare dependants upon a family, who, entering it from their earliest youth, have there remained gradually rising step by step to the situation of highest confidence and responsibility within the little circle.

He came in, hurried and hesitating, with a stooping gait, for age had laid its heavy hand upon him, and, moreover, he was alarmed at the account poor, stupid John had given of his master, that worthy having thus announced Mr. Aubrey’s orders.

“Heigh, Mr. Gregson, master’s a-wanting you — he’s all in a fuss like, and the gout ’ll be on his stomach in no time, if it’s not looked to — I see that, partly because he’s so pale and faint like, and partly because he’s fiercer than a lion.”

All this whilst Gregson was hastily putting on his coat, before going up stairs.

"What's the matter? — something's amiss, do you say?"

Repeated the old man, fumbling to get his arms into his sleeves, in which operation he was sadly retarded by nervous tremour,

"What do you say, John? — Master ill — what's brought this on, I wonder?"

"Why, I only told him as how the Captain was off for the continent last night, as we all thought, you know, and it seemed to strike him all of a heap — and first he went red, and then as white as a sheet — and then he flew into a passion with me, because I just dropped that I thought he warn't looking well — and —"

But Gregson had got on his coat, and was hastening up stairs before John had finished.

"Well-a-day," said stupid John, "to think of the troubles those great folks *do* make for themselves. I wonder the Captain couldn't just ha' dropped one line to advertise his father that he was on the tramp. To my thinking Mr. Aubrey's taking it very badly — he's got a stab at the heart like — and who knows if this same Captain mayn't have brought on gout i'th' stomach, and just killed his father outright. I wouldn't ha' played my poor old father such a trick, no, not for any thing."

"I hope nothing's the matter, Sir," began Gregson, with the privilege of an old and trusted servant, "I hope you are not worse, Mr. Aubrey. What shall I get for you?"

"Nothing, thank you, old Gregson — I sent for

you to ask you whether what that fool below tells me, is true; that Captain Aubrey left home last night for the continent," — then, seeing a look of dismay, as he thought, upon the old servant's face, Mr. Aubrey added — "I knew he was about to travel, but he did not intend to have set forward so soon. How do you know he is gone abroad? — And where is Saunderson? — Did he go with his master? — Tell me all about it."

This was said with an apparent composure that half imposed upon old Gregson.

"The Captain's servant carried up two letters, which came by the two-penny post — and directly afterwards he comes running down in a mighty fuss, into the boot-house, because as how — he is but an idle chap, Sir, that Saunderson, I'm afraid — and so the Captain's boots, which ought to have been cleaned in the morning, and been carried up, were all *to be done*. It's too much the way with those young fellows."

"Well — well — and so —?"

"And so, Sir, he calls to John, and begs him, for love or money, to get 'em cleaned instanter — while I," says he, "run up and do master's packing — for he's off like a shot for Ostende. —"

"Go on." —

"The packet sails at ten o'clock, and it's near nine now," says he, "and Master's afraid he'll be too late, and he told me to toss a thing or two into his carpet bag, and that was all he should want." And so, Sir, Saunderson hurried up stairs again, and then down for the boots, and sends out for a cab — and they're off in no time — and I heard the Captain

tell the man to drive for dear life, and if he was in time for the packet he would give him a sovereign."

"And he left no note — no message for me?"

"No, Sir, not a word, as I heard."

"Go and inquire whether there is nothing left for me — No — stay — make no inquiries . . . if there had been anything I should have had it before now. — No doubt he will write from Ostende. . . ."

"You may go, Gregson —"

As the old man remained standing there, looking wistfully at his master.

"You may go —"

"But, Sir — Mr. Aubrey —"

"No — the pain is subsiding. — A sort of spasm, that was all. — Go along, my poor fellow — I will ring if I feel worse."

Unwillingly the old man turned away, but he knew his master well; he dared not offer the ministrations even of a heart so faithful as his, when thus ordered from the room.

So he left it, drawing the door slowly and reluctantly after him.

And then the stern, cold Aubrey — having thus exerted himself to hide, as he thought, the disgrace of his son — gave way. He covered his face with his hands, and the tears streamed through his fingers.

The paroxysm was violent, but it was short — tears were strange, unaccustomed visitors to those eyes. — It was a first confession of weakness — a tribute to the love passing words, which, from a mere child, he had felt for this favoured boy.

The ingratitude of a child subdues the strongest heart. The bravest and most manly spirit breaks down before that blow, the force of which none but a parent can understand. Ah! bitterer than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!

Poor Lear!

His little wits were shattered by it.

The grief that could subdue Mr. Aubrey to tears was one as intense in its kind —

He wept bitterly — alone — unheeded — unseen. He *could* weep — and so far it was well for him.

But the paroxysm was soon over. Impatiently he brushed the evidence of weakness from his eyes, and his countenance was again composed — but with a sterner composure than ever.

“And this is the return,” the father mentally exclaimed, “for a partiality so great! — Alas! Alas! This is the return! — Contempt for my advice, neglect of my wishes — inveterate habits of gambling, terminating in a mean and dishonourable crime.

“And what had I done to merit this want of confidence? — Why could he not come to me? — I had only been too indulgent. — Why could he not come at once — confess his fault, and rely upon my assistance . . . Had I ever denied him anything? — And he must have recourse to this cowardly meanness! — Rob me — rather than beg from me! I little deserved it.

“But the other —

“Why, wretch that I am! was I not this very morning planning to benefit this ungrateful son — at the expense of that other, from whom I have never

met anything but the most dutiful consideration and respect.

"I should have thought better of this — I have been partial and unjust. — The folly of man perverteth his ways, and then he is astonished at the misery of his own creation.

"Well — it is thrice well, when punishment comes not too late . . . I kiss the rod.

"Henceforth this one shall be as nothing to me.

"Thank God! I have another son."

LORD ALGERNON MORDAUNT TO CAPTAIN
AUBREY.

"If you ever loved or cared for me — if you have the slightest atom of the love you affect for Emma — sweet Emma! — who loves me as her own soul — save me now — I am in difficulties, into which you have helped to plunge me, and from which you, and you alone, can rescue an old friend. I have not time for explanations — if I had, I dared not trust them to paper. Come to me — sail by the Ostende packet, which goes off at ten to-night, and meet me at Bruges. Go to a little obscure inn called *Le Cerf aux Abois*, in that street, I forget its name, which runs to the left after you have passed the clock tower; there wait till I come to you. But as you value everything that is dear in existence, say not a word good, bad, or indifferent to any one before you leave London upon the subject of this scrawl. It will be time enough for explanations, heaven knows! when we have met. I adjure you in Emma's name to do this. If

I knew a stronger under heaven to conjure by I would use it."

Such were the contents of a hurried scrawl which was put into Captain Aubrey's hands the evening of that day upon which Lord Algernon sailed. This was the note which Gregson had mentioned. Edward too well guessed the nature of the difficulties in which his friend was involved, though little aware of their full extent. He understood, too, the pride of that haughty nature, so impatient of disgrace, though so reckless in conduct; and he determined, without a moment's hesitation, to yield to his friend's entreaty, and fly to his assistance.

Inadvertently he had dropped the words "Ostende packet" when urging his man to make haste; and he was so pressed for time — so agitated and distressed by the thoughts which crowded into his mind, that he flung himself into the cab, without once thinking of the attention which was due to his father.

In his excuse, it may be said that he had for so many years been in the habit of acting for himself upon the spur of the occasion, without feeling accountable to any one for his proceedings, that it was natural enough, in the present agitation of his spirits, that he should forget there was any one to whom some explanation, to account for his sudden departure, ought to be made.

When he arrived upon the quay, the packet was about to steam away, and those preliminary puffs and noises were heard, which warn the traveller that delay is inadmissible. Edward snatched his carpet-bag from his servant, and hastened on board; and the man,

being thus left at perfect liberty to amuse himself as he pleased; and having his quarter's wages in his pocket, which happened to have been paid that morning, thought he could not do better than pass a little time in enjoying himself; so he entered an omnibus, and away he went; and vanishes for the present into darkness, as Carlyle would say.

CHAPTER XX.

My life is weariness to me;
I wish the glare of daylight o'er,
And when the sun sets in the sea,
I pray he ne'er may wake me more.
For nought brings pleasure, change, or cheer,
'Tis all the same — blank, cold, and drear.

MRS. ACTON TINDAL.

“I AM glad you are come in, Sir — my master doesn't seem well.”

This sentence greeted William, as, with a gloomy countenance, he entered his father's house — crossed to the back hall, laid his hat upon the table, and, hastily brushing away the hair that fell heavily clustering over his pale forehead, was passing on to go up stairs, and to his own room.

It was but the morning before, that Edward had communicated to his father the intelligence of what had passed between him and Lady Emma, and had received his hearty congratulations upon his happiness.

Mr. Aubrey had afterwards mentioned the subject to his other son, doing so in his ordinary indifferent manner, at the time William entered his dressing-room to make his usual call of inquiry before going out for the morning.

Little was he aware of the dagger he was thus quietly planting in his second son's heart. It was plain that neither father nor brother had the slightest suspicion of the state of William's affections, and so

far it was well. This conviction was his only consolation, and he treasured it as his last remaining comfort.

He had battled with himself, and conquered so far — even the slightest indication, by which his secret might have been betrayed, had been kept down by the strength of his own determined will. He had forced himself to receive the intelligence with apparent calmness, and to offer his congratulations with an air of cordiality, which he had the satisfaction to see imposed upon every one. So far it was well.

“Ay — so far it is well,” his heart had said, as, exhausted by this conflict with his feelings, he had at length escaped up stairs, and had flung himself face downwards upon the couch that stood by his dressing-room fire.

“Oh yes! it is well; and better — better — better far will it be when this heart has altogether ceased to beat. Yes, thank God — it’s broken — It gave way. I felt it when I offered him my hand, and hoped he would be happy. I smiled — I believe I smiled. Yes — it gave way then. Emma! — Emma! —”

Incoherently these sentences burst from him.

Soliloquy, though rare in actual life, is at times the vent of feelings strained beyond the power of endurance. It is probably the first step towards delirium, where all self-mastery is about to be lost. So at least it went with this unhappy man, a prey to passions, the external exhibition of which had been repressed with so desperate an effort. Nature had yielded at last, and thus he lay, mingling these wild exclamations with his heavy groans and tears.

He was almost as unused to tears as his father; but they fell, scalding and nearly blinding him now.

The fire blazed and crackled cheerfully, in strange contrast with this terrible agony of despair. But everything else around seemed still; for his was a back room, and you heard only the distant rumble of London, which resembled the unbroken roar of an ever-flowing river. In the best room, indeed, into which the dressing-room opened, a low, creaking noise, as of one stepping softly about, and the sound of drawers being opened and shut, might be heard.

This noise had ceased as he rushed into the room, flung himself upon the sofa, and groaned and wept aloud — and presently, at the half-open door, a figure might be seen, standing with finger upon lip, as if imposing silence, though no one else was present. The figure was that of Alice, and she continued to stand there in the doorway; and as she stood, her countenance became darker and darker, with a mingled expression of sympathy, pain, anger, and the deepest disappointment.

So she remained motionless, but with an expression of the greatest misery upon her face, until the fatal name burst forth, with that fierce and bitter cry — and then the tears gathered thickly to her eyes, and stepping forward, as if by a sudden impulse, she laid her hand upon William's shoulder, and said,

“For Heaven's love — don't — don't take on so.”

He started up — kindling with shame and rage.

“Woman! — what brought you here?”

She eyed him with a melancholy expression.

Melancholy and reproachful at once. Her look

seemed to say, "Have I not a right? — I, who love you more than life."

He could not be insensible to that mournful, wistful look, and his heart softened towards her, as sitting down upon the sofa, from which he had started, he said with as much gentleness as he could command —

"But, mammy, you should not surprise me in this way."

"He calls me mammy still," answered her heart.

Her voice uttered humbly these few words,

"I only came to bring in your clothes from the wash, and put them by in your drawers as usual. You know Mr. Jones lets me do that for you — I do it tidier, and I like to do it. I heard you groaning, and thought you were ill. I beg your pardon" — with another of those strange, unintelligible looks that were often seen upon her face — "I know my place — I'm only your poor nurse — I don't forget — you take care I shan't forget."

"You are the only person who cares for me in the world," he said taking her hand, and making her sit down by him, "*that* I know — but Alice, you should not do this — you should not peep through key-holes and door chinks and spy me out in this way — there are moments in every man's life which should pass only between himself and his God — no human eye should witness such — not even the most loving one."

"Key-holes and door chinks," she repeated, looking much hurt, and letting go his hand. "You must have a strange opinion of me if you think me capable of such mean tricks as those — peeping and listening, like a vile, curious menial, eh? — Key-holes and door

chinks — ‘and a Syrian was my father,’” she added, drawing herself up with a certain pride.

“Dear Alice, don’t be offended — I meant no such thing. I am sure I did not intend to hurt you. I know you are far above the base tricks too common with those of your class. — I am sure you would scorn to peep or to listen to gratify any idle curiosity — or for the sake of your own advantage — but your love for me blinds you — I do not like to be watched in my moments of weakness, — not even by you, my good nurse — my foster-mother — so don’t do it again, please.”

Once more those dark, deep eyes, were fixed upon him with a wild yearning look — but she said nothing more.

She continued to sit in silence by his side, and at last her hand slowly, almost as if in spite of herself, moved along, till it touched his, and got possession of it again; and then she seemed to gather courage, as this little familiarity was not, as was sometimes the case, repulsed, and she said:

“You are very miserable, aren’t you?”

“Pretty well for that” — trying to assume an air of levity.

“You love that woman still, in spite of all —”

“And shall, whilst I have breath. Hear me, Alice, I did not intend — I hoped to have died as I hoped to live, with this secret lying hidden in my breast — killing me there by inches — unsuspected by any one, — but you have found me out, good nurse; and why should I affect mystery with you. Perhaps He, who alone knows the utter desolation of this heart, has raised me up one friend, to whom I may speak

— one comforter who will neither embitter, nor scorn.”

She bent down her head, humbly touched with her lips the hand which she held, gently pressing it as she did so — but she lifted not up her face again, and he went on —

“Yes, Alice, it is vain to attempt to conceal it from you. I love her. — Love her! — the word means nothing — everybody talks of love. Every fool thinks himself in love — I don’t know, perhaps, it may be as bad with them as with me — we all think our own case the worst. . . . And she is to be my brother’s wife!” — he burst forth with fresh agony — then restraining himself again, he went on more quietly — “I scarcely know how it will be with me — I can’t understand it very well — I shall try to get along as well as I can — perhaps I may be able to do it — perhaps not. Alice, if upon the morning that makes those two one — or may be a week after — a swollen corpse is fished up from the Serpentine and carried to the dead-house to be owned — don’t own it — you’ll know well enough whose it is, Alice — don’t own it, but steal it — steal it — get somebody to steal it and carry it away, and bury it under that tree by the rivulet where you used to sit, whilst I sailed my boats. I remember it all as if it were but yesterday.”

“And you love her so, — I was not aware how much,” she said, raising up her head and showing a face in which the sweetness of ineffable feelings mingled with an air of the greatest determination — “You love her so that you cannot, cannot, be happy without her.”

"Happy! — Ask me, if I can *live* without her!"

"Then you shall have her — she likes you; that I know — and if this brother of yours had not come in your way . . ."

"Say that again. — It is what I say to myself. — What was it you were saying?"

"That she likes you — that I am sure she does — and that you are the man, you, William, that really suit her best. Trust *me*, my dear . . . Sir — I beg your pardon — only trust to me."

"Oh, nonsense! what vain nonsense this is!"

And he shook his head half mournfully, half impatiently.

"Don't let that Captain have her, William — why should not you be happy as soon as he? — You love her ten millions of times better than he ever did, or ever can. — It's not in him — he's a good natured, warm-hearted, pleasant fellow enough — but you — my William —" and her eyes sparkled — "but what are you?"

"Not one made to please a woman's eye," he answered.

"Ah! you little understand women — you little know them — you think a fair coloured cheek, and a handsome blue eye, and a gay and gallant address are all in all with women — you little know them. — Foolish and proud they may be — but after all it is the *man* they seek — the character that makes the man — mind and strength, and seriousness, and real passion. — That's what they love. — Fond fools! they often mistake. — They fancy they find what they admire — they worship the counterfeit — but when

the true thing really comes — oh — then — then, then it's a different affair, William Aubrey."

And she pressed his hand again, and then she rose, and stood before him as she was going away, and said expressively, "Have patience — only have patience."

The remainder of that day had passed, he scarcely knew how. In after years, when he had once or twice endeavoured to recall these desperate hours, his recollection was too indistinct, it was all one black confused scene of misery.

He put little or no faith in the assurances of his nurse — they were to him but idle words, yet the affection this strange, vehement woman cherished for him, the deep intense devotion, expressed in every word and gesture, was a kind of comfort in the midst of his wretchedness.

It was impossible not to be moved by these humble and passionate assurances of a love which was as a mother's love, and indeed the affection of a foster nurse is much of the same nature — and he, who had never known tenderness from his true mother, felt all this the more.

This was the only feeling that could in the least sweeten the desolate bitterness of his heart, and it was but a faint and ineffectual remedy.

He remained moodily sitting upon the little couch after she was gone, in a sort of stupefaction, of utter despondency — quite done up for that day.

At last he rose from his place, staggering about as if he could hardly stand, took his hat, went down

stairs and let himself out by the front door. It was by this time dark. So he wandered about the streets, and through the lonely Park. The whole evening and the following night had thus been spent — he did not come home at all, but no one missed, or inquired after him, until Mr. Aubrey's increased illness having alarmed old Gregson, he had gone up to Mr. William's room, to ask him to come down; and not finding him there, had waited uneasily — now going to his master's door to listen — now to the door of the house to look out — till at last William appeared, slowly approaching up the street.

He passed through the open door without seeming to notice Gregson, who stood there watching him come up, and was beginning to ascend the stairs, when the old man followed, and stopped him with,

“I am glad you are come in, Sir — Master does not seem well.”

“What's the matter? — Where's my brother? — With him, of course. Nothing much amiss, I hope?”

He, however, mounted the stairs, rapidly, and turned towards his father's dressing-room.

He knocked at the door. —

His father's voice answered by the usual “come in” — and two as miserable men as the earth held that day, met each other. They were both looking wretchedly, and both shocked at each other's appearance.

William started back — Mr. Aubrey leaned forwards.

“What is the matter?” was exclaimed on both sides.

“My dear Sir, you look ill —”

"William, you look dreadfully —"

"What has happened?"

"What is the matter?"

William's face was wan and pale — he was exhausted by the pain he had endured during the past hours, the passionate indulgence of feelings so rarely indulged at all; but in Mr. Aubrey the very foundations of life seemed to have been sapped, and he had the air of a man who would never recover from the blow he had received. He was, however, the first to speak again.

Sinking back into his chair, he said, in a hollow voice —

"Why need I ask? — I see by your face that you know all."

"All, Sir! — I know nothing — I left you but yesterday, rejoicing in the prospect of your eldest son's happiness — I find you now very ill, and it is evident that mental distress is the cause of this illness — but I know nothing and have heard nothing —"

"Have you seen your brother — Captain Aubrey?"

"No, Sir."

"Heard nothing of him?"

"No — why do you ask? — what has happened?"

"Where have you been all this time, that you two have not, as it seems, met since yesterday morning?"

"I left Edward in your room when I went out. — Since then I have not been much at home — I was not well — I have been trying to walk it off."

"You look very ill, William. You say that my face bears the traces of great mental pain — I am sure yours does. — Are you unhappy too, my son?"

Mr. Aubrey had never in his life before spoken to his second son with so much tenderness. The tone melted William. In his present softened and exhausted state he was peculiarly alive to kindness, and this was quite unexpected. He sat down upon a chair that stood opposite to his father, and gently passing his handkerchief over his brow, to wipe away the moisture which the fever of pain had brought there, he said,

"We have all our turn, Sir — I am not particularly happy — Why should I be?"

"Why should you, indeed?" was the answer, quite unlike the harsh, reproving tone that used to meet any expression of this kind. Remorse was beginning to make itself felt in the father's heart. "What sacrifice," he went on, "*has* ever been made to your happiness — yet you are well conducted, honourable, and dutiful. Whilst others! . . . I have done you injustice, William — great injustice," he continued with energy, "and here I beg your pardon — and thus" — and as he spoke he hastily opened a small drawer in the table close by him — "and thus I revoke one of my acts of injustice —"

And taking out a folded paper, he deliberately tore it in pieces and flung it into the fire, and

"Would to God," he said, "I could as easily destroy every vestige of former error."

William started forwards. He thought his father was raving. He made a gesture, as if to arrest the hand that was tearing up the Will — for it was his Will that Mr. Aubrey was destroying. — But his father pushed him impatiently aside — "Nay — nay — let me do it. — You have often enough interfered to shield him from the consequences of my displea-

sure — and blind fool that I was! — I could not even draw the inference! — but it is done now. — William, henceforward look upon yourself as my only son and heir — for I have no other!”

“Good heavens! — Sir, what can you mean? My brother! — Edward! — what has happened — No accident — Heaven of heavens!”

“Oh, be calm!” said Mr. Aubrey, bitterly — “I have not been fated to lose my boy by an accident — such as a rearing horse, and his head smashed against the curb stone! — I, who have so doatingly trusted, have met with my deserts — it was right I should — and lose my son in an altogether different manner — William, your brother is a scoundrel, and I have done with him for ever.”

William's face underwent a change, paler it could scarcely be, yet paler it grew — it became wan to blackness — but his eyes, those deep, expressive eyes, shot forth a strange light. Hope, irrepressible hope, was swelling in his breast — yet he was no demon — he was excessively shocked at his father's speech.

“Impossible, Sir!” it was his first impulse to exclaim, “Edward is incapable of anything that is really wrong.”

“Oh!” replied Mr. Aubrey, bitterly, “when a man once takes to the turf and the hazard table, and associates with rascal gamblers, it is not easy to say what wrong or not he may be capable of.”

“But Edward — I thought him, I believed him to be the very reverse of all this — the very soul of honour.”

“I do not profess to understand exactly what the

young men of the present day mean by honour — to forge his father's name — and endorse the cheque for fifteen thousand pounds — and then, like a coward, skulk away to the continent!... Such things may be very consistent with a gambler's notions of honour, for anything I know, or, for anything I care."

"I do not understand you," — and William again looked anxiously at his father, as if he doubted his being in the possession of his senses.

"Pray, Sir, compose yourself — I am at a loss to conceive what all this means."

"I am composed enough," Mr. Aubrey answered, with some displeasure, "You need not look at me in this manner. — Do you suppose — were you green enough to imagine that a man who spent his nights in gambling, and was hand and glove with such men as Stanhope and Crawley, would not speedily become capable of anything. I was deceived in him — but I was an old doting fool — but you, William — I thought you must have known him better."

He fixed his eyes a few moments upon his younger son, and then proceeded, slowly and emphatically —

"You *did* know him better. I thought you envious and jealous — I despised, and almost hated you for it. Now I understand it all — and here is my hand — William — let it be between you and me as it never yet has been — Justice has her due at last."

William held out his thin, white, fevered hand, and, still unable to comprehend the true meaning of this strange scene, so unlike his father's usual way of proceeding, he could scarcely help being confirmed in the belief that his father was raving — his disorder, he thought, might have affected his head. And,

possibly, he was not wrong in this suspicion. Mr. Aubrey was, certainly, at this time, not quite master of himself — the shock he had received had been too great. It is doubted, by many, whether, from that time to the day of his death, he was ever quite the same man again.

He seemed to dwell morbidly upon the injustice of which he felt himself guilty — and he certainly behaved with a severity to his offending son, which it is difficult to reconcile with the blind and partial affection he had, till then, indulged. No doubt the recollection of his past indulgence added to the bitterness of his resentment.

Whether he loved William any better than he had done before is not quite certain, but, henceforth, he seemed to consider him as occupying the place of his brother, and maintained him in it with the same exclusive interest which had before rested upon Edward.

“From this time then” — he went on, grasping his son’s hand firmly as he spoke — “from this time then begins a new era for us all — Henceforth all my old purposes and intentions are changed — That ungrateful boy is nothing more to me, and never — whilst I live — so help me God! will I look upon his face again — And here, William — good boy — good son — I constitute you heir to my estate — Take it. — Take all, and may you be better than he was, and a happier man than ever your father has been.”

“My dear father!” — William now began, and his eyes were glistening — “this kindness after the past circumstances of my life gratifies me much — but do not let the blessed feeling be disgraced by self-

interested views. — Give my brother your fortune, and to me a portion of your heart — so shall all be right between us."

"Your brother! — Do you know what you are saying?"

"Yes, Sir — I repeat it — What can Edward have possibly done to forfeit your affection, and those privileges you have always led him to consider as his own."

"Aye — aye — my exclusive affection — a pretty return!"

"What return?"

"Did I not do all I could? Have I not expostulated — warned him? Have I not expressed my fears over and over again to you? — and did you not give me reason to believe that you in some degree shared them? — and did I not, dotard that I was! believe you to be actuated by jealousy — as if a man of your sense could be blinded to his faults as I was? You knew the stuff he was made of all along. No one becomes infamous at once. He must have given proofs of what was in him, to those who could and would see. You must have known what he was capable of long ago, William."

"Capable of! — capable of, Sir!"

"Yes, capable of! — Did I not tell you before? Oh! he was capable of no great crimes — only a forgery — a little venial forgery — committed against his own father. — Why, what child cares to rob his father? Is it not all one? The tradesman's son robs the till — the young gentleman forges a cheque. — It's all the same thing."

"Forges a cheque! — My dear Sir! — Excuse me, you seem to be very ill."

"I do — do I? — Yes, I dare say I look ill enough. I am not a particularly feeling person — but when one is robbed by a son — a son for whom one would have died — a son to whom nothing — nothing was ever refused — aye! that's, that's the damning thought of all. If he had only come to me — and confessed it!"

"I am in confusion — this is a dream, Sir — shake it off — shake it off. You are not quite yourself — a disagreeable dream — shake it off. Try to compose yourself — a little sleep, a few hours' sleep," —

William kept repeating, rising up in much anxiety, and going to his father, who he now felt convinced was mad.

"Pray shake it off."

"Shake it off!" cried Mr. Aubrey, impatiently pushing away his son's hand. "Shake it off! — You think me mad, do you? — and well you may. Oh, that I were — mad or dreaming! but no, no — here it is" — and putting his hand into the side-pocket of his coat, into which it had been hastily thrust, he drew out a crumpled paper, and presented it to William.

"William spread it out and examined it.

"It is a large sum certainly, father," he said "but" —

"But! Will you never understand?" cried Mr. Aubrey. "Do you see those two signatures — I tell you one is *not* mine — and the other is *his*."

William could only stand looking aghast, but as if he still required further explanation.

"Must you?" — Aubrey bitterly went on — "Must you? — will you have it all out in good black and white — in plain, damned words? You shall have them: — Your brother the Captain has forged a cheque upon his father's banker for fifteen thousand pounds, in order to pay a certain rascal named Mr. Crawley, for losses incurred at a particularly nice little game — called hazard!"

"Impossible, Sir! — Impossible! — This can't be. There are things which one ought not to believe even if one saw them done before one's eyes. Edward has been faulty, and his passion for play is much to be regretted — but this — No, father — this he never did — It is impossible! He never wrote those names —"

"You say so!" — and for a brief moment a gleam of joy broke over the darkness of Mr. Aubrey's soul — "Nay, then!" — but sinking back again, and his countenance growing blacker than ever — "*there can* not be a doubt of it."

"I will never — never believe it. It is monstrous! It is an incredible falsehood, invented by some enemy of his — Heaven alone knows why! But I would pledge my existence that it is false. Send for him, Sir — send for your son — let him deny this to your face — as I am ready to pledge my soul that he can and will."

"Send for him!" said Mr. Aubrey, with a cruel irony — "Oh! by all means — only he has absconded. He has run away to the continent. Oh, All Merciful! — that I should have lived to see this day!"

"Absconded!"

"Yes, he's gone — he's safe! — and his secret, too, is safe. The cheque has been honoured, and his reputation screened. It is true, they took it a little oddly at A.'s — but it's all hushed up, — vague suspicions, merely — I took care of that. For your sake, and mine, William — one would not blush for a member of one's own family. Oh, yes! I dare say he will soon return to his profession — Perhaps be a great man still — who knows? An Admiral, maybe, and wear the red ribbon? Have a name in history — who knows?"

"But let him look for nothing more from me. Once lost, my confidence is gone for ever. This is no boyish trick — no childish extravagance. He is a man — and he wears a fair outside — and he is respected and beloved — and he was about to be received into an honourable house — and to marry the sweetest girl in London — and all the time he has been a wretched associate of blacklegs and gamblers, and a bettor at horse-races, and a dicer at hazard; — and, worse than all this, staking more than he was worth, and ending in a forgery and a robbery — that's it.

"And now, William, hear me out. Don't interrupt me — I tell you I will not be interrupted, —

"I have done with him for ever — not one penny — not one penny shall he ever touch of mine. He has his profession. And as for that sweet girl, she is not to be had for nothing, or I am somewhat mistaken in her mother. So she is lost to *him*. And who knows but the heir of my estate may come in for the young lady also?"

"William, you must pay your addresses to the Lady Emma. I have my reasons for desiring — nay, insisting upon it."

But William answered not one word.

He looked up sharply into his father's face one quick, penetrating glance, as if to see whether he were really in his senses; then his head sank upon his breast.

He was speechless.

And at that moment the demon entered into his soul. He was taken by surprise, it is true; but he ought to have been startled at the flood of iniquitous joy and triumph that rushed over his soul as the star of his destiny was seen to glitter above the horizon — bright but ominous, as the hair of Sirius — and the glorious aspect of his future destiny was displayed before him.

He no longer doubted of his brother's guilt. He gave the point up — he yielded himself to the too irresistible temptation — All the pride — all the ambition — all the envy — all the love — that was in him — every evil passion of his nature — passions which had long lain like slumbering serpents within his bosom — snakes! to be awakened by the hot beams of the sun, reared up their heads at once!

And so the last state of that man was worse than the first. Forgetting as it seemed the presence of his father, sinking into a deep reverie, bewildered by this sudden transition from prospects most despairing to extatic hope, there he stood silent and amazed.

Mr. Aubrey's voice, at length, aroused him. "What's the matter with you, William? The last mentioned subject seems to have affected you strangely."

William started and lifted up his head.

"She is a sweet girl, in my opinion — but if you are not of that way of thinking, why, there is no absolute necessity . . . — yet I confess I think it would be better so."

"Oh, Sir!"

"Well — well — we will talk of that by and by — but what is this — how you look, William — can it be possible — do you love this girl?"

"More than the life here, and the life hereafter!" was the passionate and blasphemous reply.

Mr. Aubrey looked at him with astonishment, but all he said was, —

"William! I ought to have known you better."

CHAPTER XXI.

She only said, The night is dreary,
He cometh not, she said;
She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!"

TENNYSON.

EDWARD had written a few lines to the Marchioness of Hurstmonceaux upon his return home the night of the races, and had given them in charge of a servant before he went to rest, with orders to ride down to the Holms, at a very early hour the following morning, — and bring him an answer back.

The messenger was to ride post, so that no time might be lost.

In this letter Edward explained his reason for not writing to the father, — laid his proposals before the mother, — briefly stated his expectations, — and concluded with a request to be allowed to come down that morning and endeavour to plead his own cause.

He had waited impatiently for the reply to this missive, and he got it about one o'clock in the afternoon. The Marchioness received his proposals most graciously, and said that she should, immediately upon his return, lay them before the Marquis, adding that she ventured to assure Captain Aubrey, that, without doubt, her husband would view the prospect of this alliance in the same light that she did herself — as one calculated to constitute the happiness of all parties concerned.

Still, as the father had not been consulted, she would suggest that the proposed visit of to-day should be postponed until the morrow, when the Marquis would return, and the whole party would proceed to town. She ended by giving Captain Aubrey an invitation to join them at their house, in the Regent's park, to luncheon the next day.

Edward had been a little disappointed at this arrangement — he was naturally impatient to see his mistress again, but he knew the Marquis of Hurstmonceaux had the reputation of being of a somewhat difficult temper, — and he concluded, and justly enough, that the Marchioness had her own good reasons for this little piece of etiquette, — which he could not help thinking would otherwise have been unnecessary.

So he settled himself as well as he could to bear this slight disappointment — but, not feeling in the humour for society, instead of sauntering away the morning in the usual manner, first at his club, and then on horseback in Rotten Row, he ordered his horse early, and sallied forth upon a meditative ride in the direction of Harrow. Whiling away the time in pleasant reverie enough, among the sweet, shady, solitary lanes, by hedges filled with honeysuckles and wild roses, which are still to be found in that direction.

In consequence of this indulgence of a lover's humour, Edward was not seen in town that day; and instead of coming home to dinner, finding it late when he turned back, and feeling rather indisposed to a tête-à-tête dinner with his brother, he had taken a mutton chop at a hedge row inn, some six or seven

miles from London, and had not returned till late. On his entrance into his father's house, he was met by Lord Algernon's letter, which filled him with terrible anxiety.

That something was very much amiss he felt certain, — and his heart smote him for many things that he had done, — more especially for that fatal and restless temper he had indulged, and which had impelled him, in the disorder of his mind, to have recourse to the distraction of that awful hazard table. He could not help feeling that his most unfortunate run of unparalleled good luck had tempted his more daring and unprincipled companion to enter upon that course, which as he feared, to him had proved so ruinous.

Then he bitterly reproached himself for his inconceivable madness and folly at Ascot — which had terminated in obliging him to press Lord Algernon for money that he now began to fear could very ill have been spared, — but far were his worst anticipations from approaching the dreadful truth.

He was, however, impatient beyond measure to reach his friend, — and he determined faithfully to adhere to his directions, and to preserve complete silence as to what had happened, — except so far as regarded two persons, — his father and Lady Emma, to each of whom he wrote hasty notes, — merely informing the one, namely, his father, that unexpected business had obliged him to cross to the continent, and that he should be absent a few days; — and to the other, a few passionate lines, leaving it to her to divine on whose, and upon what account he was gone — but offering no further explanation.

These notes had been given to his servant to post, which the fellow forgot to do that night as well as the next morning — being in fact very drunk during the first period of time, and very ill in consequence during the other. When he came to his recollection, it was too late, he thought, to send the letters — which by the date of their arrival would be evidence of his neglect of orders — so he settled that the safest way would be to burn them, and swear he had dispatched them at the proper time.

Accordingly both letters were disposed of in the fire.

The evening that Captain Aubrey left London, Lady Emma with her mother dined out at a house in the neighbourhood of the Holms, where lived some people with whom the Marchioness had but a slight acquaintance. But they were rising people of immense wealth, beginning to *mark* in the world of fashion, and she, who never lost an opportunity of advantaging herself or her family, thought it as well to be upon acquaintance terms with the parvenu Croesus, and so she had graciously accepted an invitation rather forced upon her, and she and Lady Emma — this last most unwillingly — had set out together for the dinner, and at the amphitryon's house they had accordingly arrived.

It was rather a mixed company that they found assembled in the drawing-room, — an *omnium gatherum* from the races of the preceding day — and there was not one person in the room with whom the Marchioness was acquainted, except the master and the mis-

tress of the house; and, though Lady Emma was too beautiful and distinguished looking to escape observation, and the mistress of the house too impatient to have the dignity of her guests known, not to have her name published immediately, yet there was no one present sufficiently intimate in the circle in which the Hurstmonceauxs moved to suspect in the least the relations which subsisted between them and Captain Aubrey.

The consequence of this ignorance was, that Emma, sitting demurely there, appearing to listen to the very insipid attempts at conversation made by the young lady of the house — and with her ready wits wandering about the room observing and listening to other things — was fated again to hear, as she had heard at the never-forgotten party where their eyes first met — that name brought up again — which was still in everybody's mouth. The race, of course, was the grand subject matter of discussion — the race of that day, at which our ladies had not been present, was talked over, and the good or ill success of the winners and losers commented upon, but it had furnished nothing remarkable in its incidents, and the subject was let drop, and then people began to speak of what had happened the day before, and to argue the matter of the bets — that is to say, how far, under the circumstances, the losers were bound to pay. Some maintained one thing, some the other. Much might be said upon both sides — Was ever argument long maintained where this was not the case? People do not contest whether two and two make four.

In support of the different opinions, many names and authorities were quoted — at last a man said, —

Well, I know one — and he's as honourable a man as breathes — but no ninny — and he has paid his bets without hesitating — I saw him myself hand a cheque for five thousand pounds sterling to Stanhope."

"Rather a large sum — and you say he paid it without disputing the matter?"

"There was a little palaver about it — that fool Mountford must put his finger into the pie — but it ended by Captain Aubrey acknowledging that he was bound to pay, and giving his cheque for the money."

Miss Matilda Barton, by her side, might talk till she was hoarse, Lady Emma heard not a syllable henceforth that she uttered. Her attention was riveted upon the conversation that was going on among the two or three gentlemen who were speaking near her, and she heard what follows, —

"Twelve thousand pounds, did you say?"

"No, I said five."

"Rather a large sum for a youngster like that."

"Tush, man, — his father is rich as Dives."

"And as little inclined to throw his money away."

"But this is his favourite son — he can refuse him nothing."

"He'd need be his favourite son — if all tales be true," put in another gentleman, who had not spoken before.

"Tales! — What do you mean? why Edward Aubrey is as excellent a fellow as breathes," retorted the first speaker warmly.

"May be — may be — I don't profess to know much about him — only he frequents rather odd places, I'm told — for such an admirable Crichton as the world would give him out to be."

"Odd places! what can you mean — Odd places!" . . .

"Oh — only odd places for people who aim at perfection. Not odd places as regards their gentility — quite respectable — highly respectable, but a little given to"

"What *can* you mean?" — asked the advocate of Edward Aubrey, in an irritated tone.

"Pooh, Charlton! — Don't go into a passion about it — a man may have ten thousand good qualities, and be all and everything that you and the rest of the world believe of Captain Aubrey, and yet he may be a little too fond of shaking a certain fascinating machine."

"You don't take him for a gambler!" cried the other angrily.

"Why it depends — A professed gambler — a regular blackleg — no — a thousand times, no. But if you mean by gambler, one who wins and loses more than he ought at games of mere chance, and frequents clubs where high play, and nothing short of *very* high play, is the order of the day — why — I don't like to give ugly names, yet I for my part like to call things by their right ones — so we will call it — what shall we call it? — perhaps better give it no name at all, and let the subject drop."

"But I won't let the subject drop — I defy you to prove your words, or rather your insinuations — for what are they but mere insinuations?" cried the other waxing very warm.

"My very good Sir," said his opponent, who was a middle aged man, at least ten years older than Edward Aubrey's passionate advocate — "The matter is one of perfect indifference to me — and as it seems

to have wounded you in one tender point or other — I beg to be excused from pursuing the subject further.”

And with a slight bow he turned upon his heel and went away.

“That is so like him,” — cried the young man impatiently, — “always dropping these sort of obscure hints, that seem to imply a vast deal more than they openly assert — I’ve a great mind to follow him, and tell him to his face that he’s a d—d liar.”

“Don’t do that, my dear Sir,” said a young man of his own age, who had been till now a silent observer of what was going on — “for two good reasons — First, he’ll shoot you — which would be a pity for a man, heir to fifteen thousand a-year; and secondly, that I’m rather afraid, with all submission, that he’s in the right. — Edward Aubrey is sworn companion and brother in arms to one Lord Algernon Mordaunt, and he frequents a certain club, well-known in the annals of this bad town as the C. C. Club, and, moreover, I happen to know, that one night he won enormously, at a little game called hazard — and I conclude that he lost it all again, for he was pretty well cleaned out before he came to Ascot.”

“You don’t say so, Phillips!”

“But I do — and know it for a fact. Well, well, ‘forbear to judge, for we are sinners all,’ as the man says in the play.”

And all this time her cheek was growing paler and paler, but her back was turned to the party who were thus conversing, and she sat where she was screened from general observation. No one looked at her, no one heeded her, as she drank in sentence after sentence of this cruel discourse.

And then she recollected something that had been passing between Edward and another young man, as they stood by her mother's carriage. — Something about money that Edward wanted — and had lost.

And her head began to swim and get confused.

The little conversation party behind her broke up, for there was a summons to dinner, and as it happened that the very man, who was introduced to Lady Emma to lead her into the dining-room, was the one who had last spoken.

Involuntarily she drew back, with a repugnance which she endeavoured to hide, and which he did not seem to perceive, for he held out his arm, which it was impossible to refuse, so she found herself seated between him and the very youngster who had been such a champion of Captain Aubrey's.

How she longed to renew the subject! — to speak to him of Edward — again to hear him defended so warmly. She little cared who was right. She believed nothing — she was determined she would believe nothing ill of Edward.

Alas! her resolution obstinately to deny the truth to her own heart, was all that was left her.

It was not till the dessert that the subject was renewed, by Mr. Charlton saying to Mr. Piercefield,

"I wish, Piercy, you would not lend a helping hand in spreading these stories that have got about concerning that friend of mine."

"Well, I won't then. I am sure I don't want to be the ill bird to any one — least of all to a friend of yours. But if you *are* his friend, tell him to beware of what he is about — that Lord Al...." — a look most expressive was launched at the speaker

above the head of Lady Emma, who, stooping down towards her plate to hide her change of countenance, when this subject was renewed, appeared to be engaged with her strawberries.

Mr. Piercefield looked horror-struck at the scrape, and took refuge in a dead silence, which lasted till the ladies left the room.

"I shall see him to-morrow — twelve hours — thirteen hours — not more, and then I will have it all out with him. He will tell me — for he is truth and candour itself, all that has passed. Shameful, scandalous falsehoods! I will be bound. He, a gambler! — he! — but what did they say of Algernon? Alas! dear, dear Algernon! Must you be calumniated, too? Dangerous society for Edward Aubrey, whom he loves so dearly! No, I will never, never believe it — but I shall see him to-morrow, and then I will ask him all, and he will tell me all; for are not truth and sincerity themselves written in those eyes — those sweet, those brave eyes — so sweet, and yet so brave — so all that woman loves and ought to love. Oh! that to-morrow were but come!"

And, consoled by her own faith in the man she loved — in all the security of a warm, trusting heart, the young girl laid her head upon her pillow, and slumbered as peacefully as a child.

She thought the carriage never would come round. She thought her father and mother never would have finished their breakfast.

She had breakfasted in her own room, by her mother's desire, who had a vast deal to tell and to talk over with the Marquis, before they returned to town.

Her tale was a very agreeable one to the impoverished nobleman — the man living upon expedients and contrivances. An alliance with so wealthy a man as Mr. Aubrey, and the large allowance he proposed to settle upon his son, was like the prospect of abundant and refreshing fountains to the one perishing with thirst.

He listened with the greatest good humour to the Marchioness's history, and what was still more unusual, patiently endured all she had to say relating to business matters — he was a man that detested business. In short, such was his complacency, that he even went so far as to give his lady a cheque upon his banker for a pretty considerable sum, to be laid out, as he said, upon the daughter's trousseau, — the Marchioness having proved to him that her credit was too low at all the finery shops she was in the habit of frequenting, for her to obtain what was needed upon the plan he would have greatly preferred, namely, that of taking everything and paying for nothing.

"And this will be the last trouble you will have with the dear child," said Lady Hurstmonceaux, caressingly. "She will have her share of my settlement at both our deaths, and every expense upon her account will be henceforth spared. And really, considering all things, it is a very fair match, though Emma is excessively handsome."

"A pretty girl enough," said the Marquis, carelessly. "Yes — as you say, it's well to have her

settled. But where's Algernon? — He was not upon the ground yesterday. What's become of him? I want his opinion about a new purchase I have made."

"A new purchase! Will my humble opinion be of any use?"

"Not in the least, Peggy. You know as much of a race-horse as I do of a farthingale."

"A race-horse! — my *dear* lord!"

"Well, well — be quiet — don't look so horrified. Nonsense — I did not know what I was saying. Did I say race-horse? I meant cart-horse — gig-horse — carriage-horse — anything but race-horse — *I* keep race-horses!"

"Indeed I hope not — I devoutly hope not," said the Marchioness, in secret rejoicing over the cheque she held closely in her hand. "My dear lord, I do devoutly hope that racing stable of yours is not going to be set up again."

"Peggy, my dear, go and look after your daughter's petticoats and laces And so you say this fine son-in-law of yours is coming to lunch at two o'clock, and you want me to meet him."

"If you could — if you would. It would be greatly better — I would fain show the greatest cordiality."

"Right enough," replied her husband, thinking of his own hopes and plans for benefiting by the alliance. "Very true, my love. Will you give me a place in your carriage? I may as well go up with you and Mem, and then you will be sure of me."

"When *will* the carriage come round?"

It came to the door at last, and the three were

soon seated in it. And then the Marquis chucked his daughter under the chin, and said —

“Hold up your head, Mem, and let’s have a look at you. Deuced handsome you are, you chit — one can’t deny that. And so — and so you are going to throw yourself away upon a Mister Ed —”

“Upon an esquire and a captain, if you please, papa — and a hero to boot,” said Emma, smiling and blushing saucily at once.

“Well, I believe he’s not a bad fellow — people speak well of him — he made a sort of potter in the newspapers at one time — and so, I suppose we may as well throw you away — though it’s half a pity it is — for you *are* a beauty, and no mistake.”

The eyes of the young girl brightened.

Yes, she was proud and happy to be beautiful — proud of the distinction, happy in the distinction — proud of being something well worth the acceptance of him she loved — and then to hear her father speak of him in this manner!

“Dear — dear papa! how good you are!” — and she took his hand, and bent down, and kissed it.

“Good — am I good?” he said with some emotion, for the words so ill-deserved struck him for once to the heart — “Good! — not good for much, I am afraid, my little girl.”

“So good! — so very good,” she kept repeating.

“Thankful for small favours, my pretty one — but if it proves me good to be very glad to see you happy, and with a brave, honest seaman, though he is but a captain and an esquire as you say, saucebox — why it’s easier than I ever thought it before to be

good — and so bless thee, my child — and let us say no more about it.”

And having had quite enough for one while of this little scene of affection, he pulled a newspaper out of his pocket and began to read. She, sitting, thrown back into a corner, the picture of bliss and content; whilst her mother, with a face of business, sat in the one opposite, calculating how far the cheque she had in her pocket-book would go in clearing her present embarrassments, so as to secure the greatest possible amount of credit in obtaining her daughter's trousseau; which, with her usual love of show and magnificence, she resolved should be as handsome as it was possible to contrive.

And now they enter London — and Lady Emma stealthily looks at her little watch, and it is already half-past one o'clock — Oh, fly ye horses! — She wants to be there before he arrives.

They stop before the door of the villa, or rather palace in the Regent's Park, and Lady Emma springs out, and hastens through the hall, and up to her own room. She wants to look into her glass, and take off her bonnet, which she thinks a prodigiously unbecoming one, and to arrange her hair, and assure herself she is very handsome.

And she is very well pleased with the happy face which she meets in the glass, and is in such a pretty little fuss and hurry, yet so good-natured withal with her maid — though her maid is constitutionally as slow and cold as her mistress is quick and ardent — but Emma is naturally sweet-tempered — and then, she is so happy now, that nothing can come amiss.

And so the clock on the chimney tells two, and

the little bell at the top of the stairs rings its signal that luncheon is ready; and down she comes with her sweet bright face, looking so charming as she opens the door!

And sees . . . !

The Marquis at the foot, and the Marchioness at the head of the table, and two empty chairs on opposite sides the one by her father, intended for herself.

My lord and my lady have seated themselves, because they do not choose to appear to be kept waiting, but they have not yet begun luncheon. They are every moment expecting Captain Aubrey to appear.

The Marquis lays his hand upon the chair by his side, and says —

“Come here, child.”

And she sits down there — and tries not to feel so chilled, — and endeavours to think of differences of clocks, and of unavoidable interruptions, — and so they sit in silence till the clock rings half-past two.

And the Marquis, without saying a word, plunges his knife into the cold quarter of lamb before him, and then turns and asks Emma what she will have.

“Nothing, thank you.”

CHAPTER XXII.

I fear too early: for my mind misgives,
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars,
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date

ROMEO AND JULIET.

“NOTHING, thank you.”

The Marchioness upon this raised her eyes, which had been bent thoughtfully upon the table-cloth — she was still ruminating upon the trousseau.

“Nothing! Nonsense, Emma, dear, you must not go without your luncheon — we shall have you quite ill — Give her a morsel of lamb, my lord, if you please” — and, pouring out a glass of wine — “drink that, child.”

For fear some judicious critic should here exclaim upon the gross ignorance or negligence of the writer, in supposing that people of such rank and consequence in the world as the family now upon the tapis, ever lunch without having servants waiting upon them — be it known, that the Marchioness had, upon this occasion, ordered them out of the room, desiring that the short period of time which the Marquis would probably allow to his intended son-in-law, should not pass under the restraint of witnesses, as covered with eyes and ears as the goddess of Fame herself, according to Virgil or to Pope, I forget which, could be.

“Drink that, Emma, and let the clock alone, dear — Something must have happened, no doubt — I heard Mr. Aubrey was very far from well — and Edward is a most affectionate son — and, besides,

my love," this was intended for my lord's ear, "his father has been so excessively generous to him, and he comes into such a large property whenever the sad event of his father's death should take place — that he cannot be too attentive to him during his life-time — depend upon it, my love, that is the reason he does not come. So take a morsel of lamb, and swallow that glass of wine like a good girl."

The Marquis was a good deal absorbed in his luncheon by this time, and he began to look about him, wanting mint-sauce and the castors, and, somewhat fretfully, he said —

"I can't imagine, Peggy, the reason for the whim of sending all the servants away."

And he rose up and rang the bell.

And the servants came, and the luncheon went on as upon ordinary occasions; and there she sat, with beating heart, listening to every sound of distant carriage approaching the gate to the park road, and glancing hastily to the window as any carriage seemed to approach — in vain.

It struck three.

And then the Marchioness rose from table, looking a good deal annoyed, but she concealed her annoyance as well as she could, that she might not still further depress and worry her daughter, who looked both pale and ill.

The Marchioness was not a very tender hearted person, but she was a good housewife of a mother, she looked to what *she* thought her children's best interests; and, as far as regarded a grown-up daughter, one of her best interests was, of course, the preservation of her rare beauty, so that anything that in the least

threatened to affect her good looks was a matter of serious attention.

Nothing affects good looks like fretting. Even a couple of hours fretting is a bad thing — so the Lady exerted herself to hide her own annoyance, and to keep up her daughter's spirits, and when they left the dining-room she put her arm affectionately through Emma's, and said —

“My dear child, depend upon it, it is as I told you — we shall have a note from him this afternoon — in case he does not, as I am sure he will, appear in person to make his own excuses.”

There was the postman's knock.

The two ladies stopped at the head of the stairs, and looked down over the railing of the corridor into the hall, and to the housedoor.

A footman opened it, and returned with sundry letters in his hand.

“Bring them up, directly, if there are any for me,” said the Marchioness, impatiently.

Whilst Emma stood with her heart beating, and her limbs trembling with anxiety.

Three or four letters were put into the mother's hand.

She opened them one after the other.

Messrs. Green and Close are under the necessity — Messrs. Roberts and Cross regret that necessity — Messrs. Phillips and Wood beg to apologise for the urgent necessity . . . &c. — There were letters of no other description in the packet handed to her.

She shuffled the letters impatiently into her pocket, and turned into the drawing-room, and poor Lady Emma slipped away, and went into her own room and cried.

Cried, pretty thing, with all her young, girlish heart, as if she had not a feature in the world to spoil.

And hour after hour passed away, and again and again the knock or the bell at the door was heard — but neither servant nor postman brought a line to her mother or to herself to account for this strange absence. At six o'clock, poor child, she stole down into the drawing-room again, for she was sick with irritation and impatience.

The room was quite empty, and she went and stood at the window, and looked out upon the green wooded park and upon the water which spread before her; but it was a gloomy prospect enough, for it happened to be a cold bleak June evening — the sky covered with sad-coloured clouds — the wind blowing gusty and cheerless — and the rain falling heavily from time to time.

Everything looked as miserable and dreary as she felt herself.

And still he did not come.

Then the dinner hour drew on, and it was time to go and dress.

Could he have mistaken? — Could her mother in her hurry have said, "dinner," when she intended to say "luncheon?" — Her mother was scarcely ever known to make a blunder of this kind, but she had been in such an unusual flutter and hurry that morning when she wrote.

How foolish to make herself so unhappy! — He would come to dinner, that *must* be it. — Else he would certainly, long before this, have sent his apologies.

And, cheered with the thought, she went up stairs with a light heart and lighter step, and spent, I know

not how long, before ringing for her maid, endeavouring with cold water to drive the colour from her red eyelids. It would be so provoking if he found out that she had been crying. — She would not for the world.

And then she rang for Elliot, and ordered out her most becoming dress, and sat patiently to have her beautiful hair plaited into a world of fair plaits, and put up with the greatest taste, and arranged herself, and looked in the glass, and was so happy in her beauty!

She had worked herself up by this time to the most perfect security, and lightly she tripped down stairs, and opened the drawing-room door, and her mother, who was sitting there, raised her eyes, and was enchanted with her appearance, and began to think she was too good for Captain Aubrey. Then Emma went into the other drawing-room, and placed herself so that she could see all those who entered as they went up to her mother, without being seen herself unless sought for.

And one or two young men came in, invited to dinner by Lord Algernon some days before; and every time the door opened poor Lady Emma's heart beat, and she felt sick and faint, it faltered and fluttered so — and each young man came up and paid their respects to her mother — but all — all — indifferent to her. Then one or two elderly gentlemen, friends of the Marquis, somewhat tardily joined the party; at last appeared the master of the house himself, and rang for dinner to be brought up. Looking so exactly as usual, and so entirely as if everything was going

on as it ought to do, that poor Emma felt herself ready to die with grief and impatience.

So dinner was announced, and one of the old gentlemen took down the Marchioness, and another took down her daughter, and the rest followed, and dinner began.

"Can any of you young gentlemen give me news of that graceless son of mine?" said the Marquis, as he helped himself to cucumber with his fish. "It is three days since I have seen him, and though he of course does what he pleases with his time, yet as this house is head-quarters, he seldom is so long without letting us know something of his whereabouts."

"We expected to meet Lord Algernon to-day," replied one of the young men, "or that we should have heard from him. — I concluded of course that it was a mere idle rumour, that he was gone abroad."

"Gone abroad!" exclaimed the Marchioness — "Where could you hear that, Mr. Wetterly?"

"Some one, I forget who, was saying at the club, that he had seen him standing upon the deck of the steamer for Antwerp."

The Marchioness looked excessively annoyed, but said nothing more.

She always dreaded the Ascot week. — She had learned by long and painful experience, how fatal it had too often proved to the Marquis, and she still more feared it for her son. He was a far more desperate gambler than ever his father had been.

Emma listened, hoping to hear something of Captain Aubrey, but no enquiries were made by her father or mother, and of course, her lips were sealed.

And so that day past away in this terrible silence, and the next day was just like it.

Hour followed hour spent in impatient expectation. The striking of every clock being like a blow to the disappointed heart, which rose again in a minute or two still to hope, and still to hope in vain.

The morning of the third day, the Marchioness had gone out early to shop, and about ten minutes after her departure, Mrs. Elliot come up to her mistress's room, and said with a somewhat mysterious air, that there was a woman below with some very fine and remarkably cheap French lace, which she was begging to show to Lady Emma.

"I am sure I do not want any lace, Elliot," said Lady Emma, rather sadly. "What can the foolish woman come to me for?"

"Nay, my lady — but indeed you *do* want some lace — and this Madame — Madame — thing-am-bob, comes just in the nick of time, for there's my lady told me to see about getting some for your new silk dress — and you know, one gets them so cheap from these French people as come in this by-sort of way — The Marchioness always likes to deal with them."

"I dare say they're all smugglers or something worse, Elliot, or they could not be so cheap — and besides I've no money."

"Oh! never mind about the money — I can manage about the money — and my lady won't be pleased, I'm certain sure, if you let go this bargain — for you *must* have some lace."

"Do as you like," said Emma wearily — She was too much out of spirits to contend with her waiting-maid about a trifle.

Mrs. Elliot had been promised a very pretty bit of lace if she succeeded in getting the finery merchant an introduction. She returned to the hall, and begged her to walk up.

"Now, my pretty Miss," said the woman, speaking with a sort of foreign accent, that any one the least accustomed to such things would have pronounced to be assumed, — "You've got me what I wanted — the opportunity to show my lace, and now don't stare with those pretty dark eyes of yours — but I have another favour to request, and do you see this card of pretty edging is for the good natured personage that grants it."

"Well, what mighty thing is it?"

"Only you contrive to step down stairs for a few minutes, and leave that young lady and me alone."

Elliot did open her eyes at this, and pretty widely too.

"Lah! what's that for, I wonder — You think you can't cheat her, I suppose, if I'm by."

"Just as you please," said the woman, replacing the card of edging in her box again.

"Oh, well — sure there can be no harm in it," eyeing the edging askance.

"I should think *not* — but just as you like."

"Well, well — give me the card, I'll contrive somehow."

And the card of lace was huddled into her pocket.

Elliot marshalled the way to Lady Emma's room, and was followed by the lace-woman.

Lady Emma was sitting listlessly upon a couch, her head resting upon her hand which was thrust into a profusion of fair hair, at this present moment in great disorder. Her eyelids were red, as if with much weeping, and her face wore that blubbered look in grief, which belongs to fresh and early childhood or youth, still fresh and childlike.

The lace-woman entered the room and made her curtsey, eyeing the young lady as she did so, with some attention. She was a woman of about the middle size, with a slender figure, almost approaching to elegance, and her face was beautiful from the regularity of the features, and the deep and dark lustre of two very fine eyes — but the complexion was withered with time and care, and there was a haggard look, seemingly the result of long-continued suffering.

She came up to the sofa upon which the young girl was sitting in melancholy mood, and very respectfully begged leave to show her some fine old point lace, which she had just received from the continent.

Emma looked up carelessly, without the least appearance of that interest and impatience common to girls of her age and rearing, upon such an announcement. She had entered upon real life, and her feelings truthful and natural, were filled by honest grief and affection, and far above taking interest in those trifles of which the very existence of many girls is made up.

So she looked vacantly at the box which the woman had by this time placed upon a neighbouring table, and was beginning to open and unpack, in order to display the contents, casting, as she did so, very significant glances at Mrs. Elliott, and at the

door; but that young lady was far more curious in fine laces than her mistress; her card of edging was safe in her pocket, and she resolved to see the contents of the box "with her own eyes," as she phrased it, before fulfilling her part of the bargain.

The box was soon opened, and a piece of beautiful old point was spread out and displayed before the languid eyes of the Lady Emma.

"It is very pretty," she said, in reply to the observations made upon it by the seller — "very pretty, but I have no occasion." . . .

"Bless me! my lady," broke in the favoured Abigail, — "no occasion for it! — It's the most beautiful piece of old point I ever saw, and beats my Lady Morchamp's out and out — and as for occasion — why is there not the trousseau to be set about — my lady told me no time was to be lost, and this would just be enough," measuring it with her fingers, "to make a berthe and sleeve-trimmings complete — just do for *the* dress — It's beautiful, my lady, — quite superb."

Lady Emma first coloured, and then turned pale, as she laid the delicate texture across her fingers then she put it gently away, with an action that seemed to say — "I have no use for it" — but she uttered nothing.

"If," began the woman — and she glanced in an almost imperious way at Elliott, who really at length seemed to feel constrained to leave the room, and was preparing to do so — "if," she continued, as the door closed after Elliott, "it be as your servant hints, I would really recommend it to the Lady Emma, to take

this lace — she will not easily find a piece more beautiful or cheaper.”

“I don’t want so expensive a thing,” answered Emma, turning away, not to avoid temptation, but from mere weariness.

“But the piece is comparatively so cheap, and just adapted for a wedding-dress,” the woman went on with a strange sort of familiarity. “It would be impossible to find anything more suitable,” — and, turning to her box — “I have a veil, too — a perfect beauty that would just go with it — my lady shall have the whole for a mere trifle.”

Emma sighed, but made no answer.

And her sigh was echoed by the stranger.

“Poor young lady,” she said, turning to her, and standing before her with her eyes fixed to the ground, and as if half speaking to herself, “Poor young lady!”

Emma was startled at this strange proceeding, and lifting up her head somewhat haughtily, she looked at the speaker with a cold offended air, intended to remind her of what she was about — the look was, however, lost upon the object of it; the woman remained standing before her with her eyes fixed upon the carpet, and went on speaking to herself, without one looking into the young girl’s face.

It seemed as if she had resolved upon saying what was upon her mind, and was half afraid of looking up, for fear of seeing something in that young countenance which might prevent her going on.

“Poor young lady! She thinks, perhaps, that she will never want a wedding veil. She is mistaken there — such beauty never goes unwedded to the grave.

But if she believes that the marriage she is now thinking of will go on, she is mistaken. — It will never, never, take place.”

There was an involuntary start, a faint shriek; then the cold dignity was resumed with intention to check at once what she considered as such great impertinence — but she did not choose to speak, and the haughty, offended air she had assumed was still lost upon the stranger. —

“She thinks, perhaps, that her secret, the cause of so many tears, is known only to her father and mother; she is mistaken. — Persons of her rank have no secrets. — Every one — even I, a poor travelling merchant, know — that her hand was intended for Captain Aubrey — *was* I say — for it is so no longer, because he has ceased to be worthy of it.”

“Silence! what do you mean! How dare you —” and her foot beat angrily upon the floor — “how excessively impertinent! Elliott,” turning round — “Show this woman the door. Elliott! Where is Elliott?”

“Just stepped out of hearing, Lady Emma,” said the woman, now raising her eyes, and fixing them upon the young creature’s face. “You would have done right to be angry, if what I have just said had been for any ear but your own. I am no enemy of Captain Aubrey’s — I wish him no harm — but this I say — he is unworthy of you.”

“Upon that subject no stranger shall presume to speak to me. I desire you to leave the room immediately.”

“Is it possible? Do you already know all, then?” eagerly advancing a few steps towards her.

Emma felt herself beginning to tremble from head to foot, and she could no longer repress her anxiety to hear more. — “Know already! What do you mean?”

“You have been expecting him these three days. — He has not come. — He never will come again.”

“Never come again! — Ah, Heaven!” starting up with a sudden, sharp cry, “You do not mean that he is dead.”

“Not that I know of,” answered the woman coldly, “but worse than dead — disgraced.”

“That I will never believe,” turning proudly from her.

“Never! Poor thing! — How long will that never last — two minutes? — three minutes?”

Emma walked indignantly away.

“Nay, nay. — We may turn our backs upon truth — but truth remains truth nevertheless. Yes, I may put this lace into my box again, I know,” stooping down as she spoke, and picking it up from where it had dropped upon the floor, as Lady Emma started up so suddenly. — “Young lady, I would fain leave you in the enjoyment of your happy delusion, yet it would be but a fool’s paradise! You were not made for such. . . . You are a high-spirited and noble creature, and can look sorrow in the face — I know you can.”

She paused as if to give more effect to what followed.

“Edward Aubrey has left the country — a convicted gambler and a banished man. — Banished by his own sentence passed upon himself, but one which the tribunals of his country would confirm, if unhappi-

ly he were brought before them. — But that he never will be — such horrible doom he will escape; for though he forged the cheque, it was upon his own father — and this I must say, upon the kindest, most indulgent, and most generous father, that ever was betrayed by son. It was the part of a monster to rob him — and he has just broken his father's heart."

Emma turned round vehemently. — She came forward wildly. She seized the woman by the two hands, and almost choking with passion she cried,

"Dare to say that again! — dare to say that again! — What business have you here? — What right have *you* to talk to me in this way? — Take your goods and be gone — do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear — and do you hear?"

"What impertinence! — how dare you?"

"Lady, we dare a good deal, when we have nothing on our own side to fear — or one thing only to fear, and there is one thing only I do fear — that you will be deceived. Perhaps he may come again before this business is generally known, and may persuade you to one knows not what — or, he may disappear and you never learn what is become of him, and the utter worthlessness of that which you pine after — I choose to let you know the truth — you may believe me or not, as you please, but *I* choose that you should know it, and if you doubt my word, write to his father, and ask him to contradict me if he can."

And then in a low, almost hissing, voice, her head bent forward so as nearly to touch Lady Emma's ear, and fixing her eyes eagerly upon her, she said, —

"Edward Aubrey, whilst making love to the most

beautiful and warm-hearted creature in this town — was unable to resist the old evil habits he acquired from the company it has pleased him to frequent since his return to England. I once told you something of this before — He has been frequenting the most notorious gambling house in this bad town; he has been betting with a low set at Ascot; and he has left the girl he loved — gone straight from her to plunge into this abyss of wretchedness and folly. He won at first, and robbed and ruined poor innocent lads, when he ought to have been ashamed of setting them such an example. But men can't go on winning for ever; and three nights ago he lost — he lost a very large sum, and he dared not — no, the brave Captain Aubrey dared not, — go straight to his over indulgent father, confess his fault, and seek forgiveness and assistance. No, he thought it easier to make use of his father's name, forge a cheque, and fly his country."

"False! — false! — false! Have done with these wicked lies." And she walked up and down the room, almost wild with passion, and yet terribly frightened at what she heard.

"Hold your tongue and leave the room, I say — how dare you provoke me by such infamous lies?"

"His father, at least, knows they are not infamous lies" — the woman said coldly; — "His old, dying father — the stern, but doating man — he does not think them infamous lies. For what do you think he has done? — Would you like to hear what he has done, believing himself to be at the point of death? He has altered his will — cut off this fine Edward with a shilling, and left the whole of his property to

the innocent, long-neglected brother. There now — You won't believe in his guilt — believe that, then — and ask yourself how your father and mother will like a disgraced, disinherited criminal for their son-in-law." —

Strange and improper as this conversation was, the poor girl seemed fascinated. — She felt it impossible to resist the temptation to hear more. She said nothing at first — then she repeated the word —

"Disinherited! — But his brother will never take — William Aubrey will never take it."

"Never — That is, provided he can help it."

"Help it!" she repeated sadly, but as if she did not quite understand.

"There are ways and means of compelling a man to accept such things. Mr. Aubrey is pretty determined when he has once made up his mind; whatever man he decides upon to be his heir — most surely he will take good care *shall* be his heir — so you need not insinuate anything against William Aubrey."

"I was not saying anything against William Aubrey."

"No, you had better not — at least not before me."

"And why not before you?"

"Because I know him — and I love him. Oh, I'd be glad to have died to see William Aubrey righted! — and, praise be to Heaven! I *shall* see him righted at last — I shall! I've lived to see justice done, and now I am ready to die! William Aubrey! — Why Edward is not fit to hold the candle to him — yet Edward has been loved and William hated, — but that's all over now. Mr. Aubrey is an inflexible man.

William may do all he can, and all he can he will do, you may be sure of that; but everything he can urge on Edward's behalf only does mischief."

"You seem to know a great deal about the Aubreys," said Emma, sitting down trembling, and looking deadly pale — but forgetting everything in the interest of the subject.

"I *do* know a vast deal of them," answered the woman. "I know them, perhaps, better than most. I have known the boys since they were babies — one I loved dearly — and he deserved to be loved — the other I never thought so much of, as the rest of the world did — and my heart, like many another heart in that family, has bled under the sense of Mr. Aubrey's injustice — And now it is strange — just before he is going to die, things show themselves in their true colours, and justice will be done. But oh, my young lady, this is a hard trial for you! — then think what it must have been to the father's heart!"

The poor girl could say nothing; between sorrow and anger she was choking.

Alice — for she, as every one is well aware, it was — looked at her for a few moments with compassion and interest; then she turned away, and began to pack up the laces and things which were scattered upon the table.

"I may take them away, now," she said. "I have told what I thought you ought to know; in all probability you would have heard the truth from no one else. Mr. Aubrey will break off the match — that intelligence will reach you in a few hours; but he will find some pretence by which to cover the real truth of the story. I think it but justice to the man

who loves you more than life itself, that you should have the means of comparing the worth of the two. I have done my duty, as I think, and beg your pardon for the pain."

She looked at Emma's pale, scared, death-like countenance once more — then heaving a sigh, she took up her little packet of goods, and without another word went away.

END OF VOL. I.



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